The Watermark

Volume X

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Volume X

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Editors' Note

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We express further gratitude to Donna Neal, Atha Demopoulos, the Student Senate, Skye Rhyddyd, Diane Venden, Ian Boyd, Dereck Mangus, Nate Moquin, Jason Campos, Gin Dumcius, *The Mass Media*, James Dow, Evan Sicuranza, and Daniel Rodriguez for allowing us to use his piece for the cover. We are also appreciative to Mary Sullivan for conducting a fiction workshop and reading from her novel, *Stay*. As always, we are extremely grateful for the dedication of our staff members – especially Michele Lisio, Nate Beyer, Ilhan Zeybekoglu, and Bernadette McHugh – and all who submitted; without them *The Watermark* would cease to exist.

Furthermore, we are pleased to include an interview with award-winning author Ha Jin that was conducted in conjunction with a reading from his new novel, *The Crazed*. The UMass community was fortunate to host Ha Jin and we thank him for the privilege of printing this interview in our tenth anniversary edition.

We apologize to Justin Hughes whose piece was censored from last year's edition. *Cuervo* can be found on page 86 of this edition.

The Watermark is a student run publication that serves as an outlet for the highest quality writing and visual art of UMass Boston's undergraduate and graduate student body. Submissions are selected by staff members via a democratic and anonymous process with the overall goal of offering UMass students the opportunity to be published. Interested students can contact *The Watermark* at 617.287.7960 or watermark@umb.edu.

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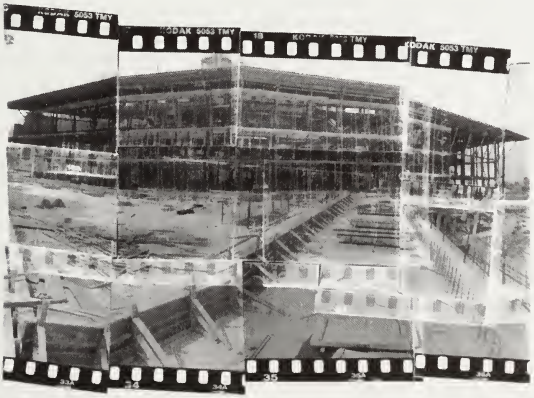

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CAMPUS CENTER I, II, & III

Black & White Photography
By DS Mangus

PLAYSTATION

By Michaela Horan

One of these days,
you'll be playing Triple Play 2002
and I will be on the couch behind you,
slowly undressing,
ignored by your cats
until it's just my translucent skin
and blue veins against
the orange fabric
of your third-hand couch
waiting for you to look.
But you won't even glance
because your team is winning,
so you have to finish
your pretend game.
You'll turn around
only to see me
dressed and reading.
Then you'll ask me to bed
and I'll say I'm too tired
and you'll roll your eyes and
say I'm always too tired.

HIS CONSTITUTION

By Darrell Penta

Pappy was a slim yardstick of a man.
February first, he was eighty-seven,
he didn't move an inch.
Against the stiffness
of winter's heady morning breath,
he didn't budge,
didn't let on like he was chilled.

At the bus stop lean-to
with scratched up plastic windows
and metal-ice slab bench
chaos had not prevailed.
Pappy was patient as a bow hunter.

A prison term at the carpet factory
didn't break him of spirit. Years ago
he came home to his family
(now long gone)
with scraps for a patchwork rug.
In that brick commode,
little plastic particles in dirty
oxygen couldn't choke him.

Though folds of sunbleached snow,
earthbound flakes like cherry blossom petals
plummeted down and around him;
Though the white weighted branches near him,
strained arches like snagged fishing poles
whispered to the ground,
"I give up;"
Pappy didn't shake. His swollen face
was the color of the bottoms of my feet,
and he just set there dreaming.

TRICKSTER WOMAN

By Jen-Ai Casal

Pomba-Gira's reproachful glance
reminds you of her agency:
She's built her altar out of keys,
perfume bottles, and black lace fans.

Sanctifier, vilifying
all that is saintly, dead and white—
her eyelid, heavy with midnight,
blesses dancers, bone-defying.

Her worshippers are well-acquainted
with her trident, swathed in shells—
Good and Bad and Something Else
are cased in the tines, triple-pointed.

If you would change the world you have
and turn the ladders upside down,
sprinkle anisette on the ground
for the Queen of crossroads, sea and grave.

While theologians try to guess:
Is God complicit in evil?
Pomba-Gira's holy revel
will answer no and sometimes yes.

LAURA DE LA TORRE BUENO, M.D.

By Jen-Ai Casal

Blonde girls with perfect pigtail names
like Joy Ash
copied square manila oaktag;
eternity finished before I crossed the *T*.
My name stretched across my desk
like a Montana sunset.

Blue-eyed girls named Jane Carr
ran through Chinese jump rope;
the teacher tripped through my endless syllables.
Laura de la Torre Bueno
spun down on Rapunzel's dark curls.

Taller than the tower of Santa Barbara
in the kitchen I slouched
wearing my cousin's too-short
lavender prom dress—waiting.
My mother prattled
all evening—stories of Papa Luis
fighting Trujillo, grandmother's hands
shaping arepas and beans.
Then she fed me milhojas at midnight,
leaves for my thousand letters.

Once in Norfolk, Nebraska,
I was exotic azucena perfume
and wild. Big sky and highway kissed.
Blond man on a Harley chanted
Laura de la Torre Bueno:
wave upon amber wave of grain
matched our ecstatic rhythm.
Living swells of my name crashed
on an uncharted shore.

Precise anatomy professors
enunciated vowels with care
tenderly as scalpels and specula.

My father cried at graduation.
I fell in love with his tears, his rebel heroes,
plantains, arepas, and beans
in an eastern ivory tower.

Now my stethoscope equals my name
in length, at least. I examine
aerobic instructors named Jan Jones
dressed in impossible paper gowns,
who nervously await—the length of my name.

SEEING SAWING

By Harmony Snedden

In Brighton, Colorado
the parks department
needs me to prune
low branches off trees
in their square parks,
so the dogs don't scratch
their eyes.

I'm a volunteer of America:
AmeriCorps, I'm pruning
a tree, a tree that did not need
an amputation. I've closed
my eyes and focused on the living
liquid red inside my eyelids—
I can smell this tree.

I open my eyes and see
the dust spray from the cut,
sweet and soft, almost steaming—
until it lands on the ground
with my knees
and the dog shit
and the dead bird without a head.

ONCE

By David Schiffer

I saw my grandfather only once.
My family went to visit him and his wife
in a large apartment chamber in Strasbourg.

The Passover sun glazed the windows
into stained-glass. I was in a sacred chapel,
but the sage was crinkled.

He had on thick brown glasses,
the empty kind a pedophile would wear.
My grandmother hung herself

from him. Dried-up patience deranged her face.
It wasn't her fault he was captured by the Nazis
and not scorched.

My father showed me a gray picture once.
A young man stands handsome in a simple smile—
then loses five years in a POW camp.

After the war he returned to Strasbourg,
found my grandmother, locked the door,
and had my father.

ENTERING THE FOREST/
LILYPADS IN THE BROOK
Printmaking
By Bridgette Melvin

TWO AND A HALF MANGOES AND TWO EGGPLANT/ FIVE PEACHES
Black & White Photography
By Arthur J. Gorham

PINE CONES
Black & White Photography
By Arthur J. Gorham

UNTITLED I & III
Black & White Photography
By M. Ahmanise Sanati

UNTITLED IV
Black & White Photography
By M. Ahmanise Sanati

LEONARDO'S ST. ANNE
Charcoal on Paper
By Ian Boyd

STORMY

By David Schiffer

There is nothing left for me to do except leave a note for my mother and tell her that I love her and know that she loved me. My father did too but that is okay because he is in jail. My sister killed herself a month ago. She was twenty-two. I am seventeen. I write letters and stories and poems that no one reads. I sing in the shower and masturbate with the showerhead. My sister taught me that when I was eleven. Books are nice and thoughtful. I read them. I used to talk to people. I like the ocean. The wind. The waves are blue and cold. There is nothing for me now, but the ocean. Two lights in Maine. If you haven't been, go. Just give me wind, give me the ocean and I can feel things. Feel things that aren't in Boston. Boston is gray and full of spikes. People sometimes leave you alone when you need to feel. I need to feel. I have things inside of me. Big things. Train tracks and windmills and orange pus.

I tried heroin when I was fifteen. My father showed me how to do it. Then my Mom saw us and cried and hit herself. You see, my sister was a junky and my dad was showing me heroin. I liked heroin and my dad. My dad—he didn't mean anything by it. He touched me sometimes on the stomach when he drank and kissed my neck. But nothing too bad except the needle and the stuff inside. I felt like a piece of water dripping and swaying. There is so much to water. I am nothing. Nothing repeats itself over and over. There is a lot of nothing in Boston and in people. People are full of nothing. Waves make nothing look good. That's the trick. I am walking right now down Newbury Street. People smoke at cafés. Good-looking people. I wish I could eat all of them. Make them feel my teeth. I want to jump into the cement. Go into the stores and yank people's hair. Swan dive into the concrete. Make something crack. The sky is blue and choppy, blank and heavy. Clouds gather foggy and mushy like soaked pillows. I told you I write. I am writing now, but you don't really know who I am. Think about it, who am I who you are reading? I could be gay or a doctor. I could be a fire hydrant or a kite or a kike. You don't know.

Maybe I'm a bowl of cereal, eat me, eat me. The sharp empty wind pushes me back inside myself. I am now inside myself. It is dark and scary. Big teeth biting and laughing and slapping. I walk in the dark and see all my lovers. They laugh too. They poke my eyes with spikes and spoons. There are knives in my ears.

I'm back at home reading because it looks like it might rain. Harry called on the telephone. He said he was sorry and worried. I asked him if he was sorry he gave me an abortion and he hung up. He's hung up on something. I'm funny. I hope you like my writing. I lost my virginity to Harry. I was drunk so he fucked me. It was murky. It felt warm and prickly like a mashed strawberry. I think that's what my baby looked like after the abortion. I got a real one. My mother paid for it out of the jar she hides in her vagina. That's not true. My mother doesn't even use it anymore. My dad's in jail. Before he left he told me my nickname was Stormy. I call myself Stormy. It's dark and windy—my two favorite things. I have to add the ocean to that and water. Dark water is the windy ocean at night. That is real. I know that. It's like sand in my mouth and my breasts in frying pans. That's not true about the breasts. I like men when they are gentle to me. I deserve it. I didn't pull the legs off the spiders or pour Drano on the flowers.

I think the only things my mom likes are flowers. When she doesn't read Emily Dickinson she's on the porch helping them grow and be pretty. The last week my father was around he killed all the flowers. Some he just turned over so the clumpy dirt fell out along with the flower. Others he poured Drano and Jim Beam on. I don't really know what happened between them. Nothing good, I guess. I know they loved each other. I think the heroin and booze and police hitting and the bad food and the piss in the bed did something. He's in jail now for a combination of those things plus a knife. But I still love him. He loved me so much, so that won't change I don't think. I also love my mom. She's at her best when she finishes watering the new flowers and reads on the porch and drinks her brown tea. I don't like tea that's brown. I do like chamomile though and I'm going to have some now.

I finished my tea so I figure I'll keep writing. Writing is good and blue. There is so much I can write though I'm

sure it's all the same. My name is Stormy. My sister is dead. My father is in jail and I think my mom is either at a meeting or buying cigarettes. She smokes now. Never near the flowers. She got mad when I did that. She said my father did that. The phone is ringing, please hold on. You can listen if you want.

"Sarah?" It's Harry again.

"It's Stormy, come on."

"Jesus, okay. Stormy?"

"Yes. What can I do for you?"

"Can I come over?"

"Why?"

"So I can hug you and talk to you."

"Okay."

I was thirteen when I did it for the first time and the guy was probably older. We did it in a bathroom at a movie theater. I had pulled down my panties and was on the toilet peeing when he walked in. I could see his black Doc Martens on the floor. He knocked on the door and asked if he could come in. His voice was deep and dark. Then I heard his zipper. He told me he had to pee. I let him in and then we were mashed strawberries on the toilet. He told me I was tight and hot and asked me if I thought I would ever have to pee again. I wasn't sure after that so he put my panties in his back pocket and looked at me. He laughed and said that I reminded him of apple jelly on toast. Then he kissed me on my eyelids and on top of my forehead like my dad did and left.

I'm out in the rain right now waiting for Harry to come over. I wonder if he'll try doing it with me like he did the last time. Harry likes to come over sometimes and hug me and tell me how he wished it were just the gunshot. Harry was my sister's boyfriend. It's really awful what she did. She took a handful of pink Paxil pills, slit her thighs, sat in her car, put on the Bee Gees, and shot her head. Just so you know, Harry wasn't my first and didn't give me an abortion – that's just something I say to joke with him, and with you. Sky-blue, that's what I called my sister after she died. She did heroin and had really bad asthma. I think my father showed her how to do it too, but maybe she showed him. My sister went to college, went out with Harry, and did heroin. In April we were having tea and cigarettes on the porch because mom was away and she told me that she loved

heroin but that it was not nice to her anymore and that she was going to quit.

"I'm a really sad person," she said.

"I don't think so."

"Well, I am, so you better not."

"Better not what?"

"Just don't. Okay?"

Sometimes she would bring me into her room and start kicking knitting needles against the wall. See, she said, I'm kicking it. She was really sad. Harry couldn't do much, so he tried putting his own needle into her like they liked to but that didn't really work either. She left a note under my pillow. It said, *Sarah, you will one day too.* She waited until it was humid and thundering one night. My mother awoke when she thought she heard thunder right on top of the street. I had been out taking a long walk in the rain. When I came back people were outside talking. There was too much noise. The rain started feeling dirty in my hair and when I saw mom holding a bloody Sky-blue in the Escort, I ran. I ran and the rain slapped me and was quiet when I cried.

Harry looks good and gives me a big hug—it hurts but in a good way. He kisses me on the forehead like my dad did and asks me how I'm doing.

"I think I'm moving." I tell him.

"What?"

"I'm leaving."

"Where you guys going?"

"Just me, mom doesn't know anything yet."

"Ok. Where and why?"

"It doesn't matter. Somewhere wet and windy. I hope the ocean."

"You have the money for it? Oceans are expensive."

"You want to come? We can room together and take care of each other."

"What? Sarah?"

I lift my eyebrows at him.

"Okay. Sorry. Stormy, what are you talking about?"

"I don't know. I just want to go out there. Listen to the waves before sleeping. Let the wind clean me and tell me things. I want to do it with the waves." He moved closer and put his arms around me. "I just need to do that."

I'm on the porch at night and it's still raining out.

After Harry put his jeans back on and we had some tea and cigarettes, he said I should stay and not be crazy. We did it on the porch. He was sweating during it and it was like the ocean. I'm not crazy, I just want to feel big things and tell about them in a good way. I want to die and kill sometimes because I can't do that. And why can't I do that? I know I have nothing to say. It's all been said before and felt a thousand times by everyone on Newbury Street. I need tornadoes and mourning doves and I want people around me to need them too. I feel it so much it's like bees crawling in and out of my fingernails. Does that make any sense? No it doesn't, but my name is Stormy and it means so much to me that I want to write everything. I want the rain to rinse me into the air so I can become rainy water too. I only did heroin that time with my dad and it felt like a pond. But I want the dark water coming out of me not into me like spikes. My sister wanted to be a writer. But she's dead now so I told myself that I would write. But I only really want to write when it's night and raining. I feel. I'm sad. My sister drools on me when it's raining and my dad kisses me. My mom's flowers are taking a shower. I'm swimming. The night is in my ears. Water slides down my neck and into my breasts and down my stomach. I can hear and touch sadness and heroin and knives and skies. I hold out my hand and let the rain drops put out my cigarettes. I know when it rains. I know I'm going far away when it rains. And there is nothing at all except this, even when I know I'm not going anywhere.

GOLDEN PARACHUTE

By Mike Marchand

A woman's voice from across the floor rises above the collective din of spinning hard drives and whirring fans, ending a conversation with a joke. At the front desk, a courier's dangling key chain splashes as he hands the receptionist the clipboard. Smiling, she signs for the thick, padded envelope. A phone rings at a vacant desk—once, twice, three times, voice mail. A group enters, debriefing in motion from a side corridor. They separate, moving decisively toward respective purposes; some sit. One man checks his e-mail, another the market. One woman sees the red light on her phone and dials the numbers to retrieve the words now digitized several floors below.

The man who is checking the market minimizes the window and dials his broker to berate him in hushed tones for his latest bum tip. The frustration bestowed by management must be shared. Last time, he called his girlfriend who told him, "Oh, poor baby; how'd you like to live with a vegetarian yoga fanatic who freaks when you cook bacon?" The phone rings in his ear—once, twice, three times, voice mail. One woman hangs up her phone at the same time; the man checking his e-mail composes a message to his lover who has promised to tell his wife the truth. Another woman heads past, entering an office where laughter has newly subsided, her short, sharp sentences spawning silence.

She turns and takes the dozen steps back to her cube. Soon she is seated, staring into pixels. She types in her password. She breathes in deeply. She picks out one pixel that seems brighter than the rest. She closes one eye and squints. The pixel grows as her vision compresses. It almost looks beautiful, she thinks, like a star or a private sun. She sighs smilingly at the life she might have in the glow of that sun. Free, unencumbered by what has been and what must be. Free to...her computer's bell tone informs her that she has a new message. She opens her eyes. Life loses luster when seen clearly, especially in fluorescent light. And this is her life, her work. That is clear. The new initiative, the new initiative, the new initiative; nothing could be more impor-

tant. She checks her e-mail. Central Office. What else is going to happen today?

> To: All Unit Managers, US Division
> From: Brussels Central Office
>
> Due to revised revenue forecasts for the upcoming quarter, our current resource allocation must be addressed.

That means you jokers have invested badly and can't pay yourselves bigger bonuses than last year.

> Therefore, performance assessments of functions pertaining to internal reporting and presentation development shall commence immediately pending review of cost benefit analysis of outsourcing said functions going forward.

Outsourcing. That's downsizing to us. That's 'move where we send you or goodbye.' And it has to be now, you bastards. It has to be now…

> All unit managers should be aware that personnel from the Audit Division will visit all US Division offices beginning February 17 for unannounced efficiency inspections. Personnel within your purview should not be informed of these inspections, as prior notice may artificially influence real unit efficiency.

Very nice, and I can't let my people know, either.

> Regards,
> Olivier Reynders
> Chief, Audit Bureau

Fuck you, Ollie.

The group quietly exhales as legal pads flutter. They

swivel in their chairs and tap keys in their open boxes.

***

Danette ponders the voice mail as she types. She had been excited by the potential feather her role in the new initiative might bestow, finally getting the chance to really put her degree to work, but the adrenaline it had kicked off was now making it difficult for her to focus. Her father had seemed tired last weekend at dinner, but *cancer?* Her mother's voice is still ringing in her head, so oddly teetering on hysterics, yet detached like a radio report, fading and swelling on an unfamiliar station, carried by storm clouds. They're so close, right over at MGH, but she wouldn't go there now. Too much to do here, too little to do there. A little toss of her head to smooth the waters of her mind; her new shampoo smells good, like a breeze in Jamaica she remembers, but the sferics of her mother's message still rise and fall.

Jason feels unsatisfied. He leaves a vaguely vitriolic message for his broker, but it doesn't lift the weight of annoyance from him; he needs resistance to break down, to hear the sound of discomfort. He needs *groveling.* Instead, the confident tone of the recording intensifies his dissatisfaction. He looks at his Rubik's Cube, his stress ball, his autographed photo of Nomar Garciaparra; no help here. He hears the keys clicking around him, marking irregular measurements of time that add up to more seconds and minutes that he is losing money. He'd have to walk down to that bastard's office at lunchtime.

Bryce is already outlining the next few months. Bryce is fastidious; Caleb says that's one of the things he likes and respects in Bryce. Bryce wonders if Caleb says things like that to his wife, too. He's seen their house, smelled her perfume; he wonders if Caleb will ever really leave her. The first time he had gone home with Caleb, he had opened the perfume, spilling some on his fingertips. He tried to wash it off, but the whole point of perfume was to resist removal. As he and Caleb kissed, he had lifted his hand to Caleb's face. Their eyes met, the scent of Caleb's wife hanging between them. Bryce wonders if Caleb's wife will be as tenacious as her scent.

Barb had been here before. She'd seen initiatives

come, rockets fueled with the exuberance of new management, and she'd seen them go, unread copies amongst the garbage falling from the dumpster to the BFI truck. Nothing but a pain in the ass, really. Acronyms change, concepts like "total quality management" superceded by "thinking out of the box" superceded by "managing for results," but none of them seemed to get the management part right. But she'd been around a while; she knew what had to happen. She had Bryce for the details, Danette's newbie eagerness, and Jason's eye, but the secret missive from Central made this one a high-stakes item. It would be tough without Doreen to keep her sane.

About six, no eight, eight *already?* weeks ago, the team members were sitting in their cubes, keeping the flow of the last initiative moving, when the horrible event had transpired. The cubes they occupy are near reception, as is the water cooler. Opposite the cooler stood a tall metal shelf that had once housed magnetic tape, about a foot from the front wall of Doreen's end of the cubes. They'd sent a new man to deliver the water that week.

The shelf was used to house the empty jugs, but the new man, going that extra mile, started sliding the full ones in after he had stacked the returns on his dolly. The shelf was high, and the man wasn't tall—he had to arc a slight layup to get them into the top shelves. The problem was, that's where he'd started, so there was no ballast. Doreen had just sat down when the shelf tipped back, momentarily using her cube wall as a fulcrum. The wall gave way, dumping her desktop and monitor into her lap. She flipped awkwardly as her chair swiveled. The end result was four herniated discs, which made it impossible for her to sit in a chair for more than ten minutes straight.

To some, this would be funny in retrospect, but not to Barb. Six years ago, weary of the empty bottles, sick of the broken furniture, and heartbroken about the miscarriage, Ron had finally packed and walked out of her life. Doreen was Barb's rock then, even picking her up from the AA meetings at night, letting her stay in the guest room until she trusted herself alone. Doreen was the only one on the team she could relate to honestly. Barb was obsessive, and details could drive her close to the edge; Doreen knew how to pull her back—"First things first, Barb."

Doreen and Barb had worked at the company for over twenty years. They'd started only a few months apart as clerks for the old New England Federated, and had, as much by attrition as by hard work, risen to the American pinnacle of middle management with its current incarnation within BelGeo Holdings. They knew how to work together: Barb had the push and the title of Unit Manager, while Doreen had the gathering arms to build a team, a good husband, and two healthy kids. They'd been through so many of these before, it didn't matter if the idea was garbage. They'd make it look all nice and shiny. But outsourcing? That meant closing the office. Danette is fresh out of college; she can move. Jason will go wherever they'd send him as long as he has a fast enough line speed to day trade; Bryce loves to travel. Doreen could retire on disability tomorrow and enjoy her emptying nest. But Barb, a candidate for a golden parachute at forty-five. She shudders.

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Danette knocks on the top of the cube wall.

"Hey, Barb. I need to take the rest of the day."

"It's not a good time, Dani." Barb turns in her chair.

"I know—I'm sorry. It's my dad. My mom called. Cancer." Tears glistening just contained.

"Oh, Dani, I'm so sorry. I..." She wants to hug Dani, who she can see shaking slightly, but all her strength is focused inward. "You do whatever you need to do. We'll be OK here." She smiles with effort.

"Thanks, Barb. I'll call you when I know more." She turns away, sobbing audibly.

Damn, Barb thinks, no Doreen, no Danette. The preliminaries for the initiative had to get out by noon tomorrow, Thursday, or nothing would get moving until next week. That wouldn't look good for the audit. At least she has Bryce, who, she's sure, is already doing the timelines, his organization and self-motivation balancing his lack of creativity. Jason, on the other hand, would need a kick in the ass. Plenty of smarts, he could spin anything any way, but deadlines paralyze him. Barb gets up from her chair and heads over to Jason's cube.

Jason is playing Tetris as Barb steps in. He's con-

sumed, so he doesn't realize she is there until she clears her throat. At the sound, he seems to lift an inch or two from his chair, and comes down with his index finger on the left mouse button, minimizing the game and restoring a bogus Excel spreadsheet.

"Look, Jace, I'm going to need your help on this one." Barb sees no need to scold him; he is still unsteady from the jolt. "Doreen won't be back 'til Lord-knows-when, and now Dani's headed down to the hospital."

"Hospital? Why?" Jason has a thing for Danette, though she'd shut him down after allowing him to fondle her ass at the Christmas party. "Is she OK?"

He almost seems to care, Barb thought. "Yes, well, no, it's her dad. Cancer."

"Damn. That's rough. She's very close to them, her folks, I mean." Jason sounded phony even when he approached a genuine emotion.

"Yes, but life goes on. We need the preliminaries out by tomorrow, noontime." She didn't want to sound so callous, but Jason would practice being compassionate all afternoon if it meant avoiding work.

"Oh, uh, yeah. So what do you need?"

"The usual, summary memo, bullets of main points, attached with the full report, e-mail to the directors' distribution list. Hard copies of everything for the files."

"Wow, yeah, um, I need to run out at lunch, but..."

"Don't run far, or long, Jace. This has to get set up for distribution tomorrow morning."

"You can count on me, Barb. Reams of boredom to the bureaucracy!" He flashes his expensive smile; Barb feels slightly queasy.

Next, Bryce. It isn't necessary, really, but he appreciates a little recognition. He isn't in his cube, but she sees that he is already working on tweaks for the timeline. He'd printed it out, and marked it in red Sharpie and yellow highlighter. Barb looks it over with tepid interest. It isn't the pressure that is numbing her; it is more the futility of the flurry that accompanies the first stage of an initiative. She turns away from the map of the theoretical future and heads back to her cube. She glances at the torn paper that Doreen had tacked up on her cube wall on top of the 'attagirl' letter from Central Office after the last initiative. 'She has, indeed,

done it very well; but it is a foolish thing well done.'

It's lunchtime; Barb can tell by the cliques of voices that rise and fall as they pass. Barb always brings her lunch; she doesn't like going to the places around the building where dangerous things are said and done. She used to take the two martini lunch, but then it became three or more, talking out-of-school, fucking in the parking garage with-God-knows-who, the blackouts, passing out at the desk. She decides maybe a call to Doreen might be a good move. It would make Doreen feel included, and, more importantly, would give Barb a reason to convince herself aloud that it will all be worth it this time. She technically shouldn't share the message from Central with anyone, but what harm could it do? Doreen could always keep a secret. She taps the speed dial with her ballpoint; the phone rings in her ear —once, twice, three times, voice mail. Ah, well, she thinks, best get down to it.

Voices returning and an acidic swirl in her stomach make Barb look up from her PC. An hour has flown by like nothing. She should eat, stretch the legs, clear the head. She goes to the fridge and takes out her turkey and sprouts on whole wheat and her Diet Coke. As she walks back, she notices neither Bryce nor Jason have reappeared. She hears a phone stop ringing; when she reaches her cube, she sees the red light is on. God, I hope it's Doreen, she thinks.

She opens her sandwich and takes a bite as she dials the numbers to retrieve the message. It's Bryce's voice.

"Ah, hi, Barbara (he always calls her that; he hates nicknames), it's Bryce. I'm having a little, sniff, no I'm *having a big problem* (he's sobbing, Christ!). Do you remember Caleb from AccuTech, well, he and I, well, but his wife found out, and he was going to leave her, but now he won't see me and I..." Just more crying, then he hangs up.

This cannot be happening, she thinks. If these people only knew what this one meant... She looks up at the ceiling tiles. She finishes half her sandwich and tosses the rest. Her stomach is in knots. She was planning to work out at the Y tonight, but she may have to go to the 6:30 meeting instead—she could use a little bolstering. She looks up at the clock. It's 2:05; where the hell is Jason? She brings up her contact list. Jason, home; Jason, pager; Jason, cell phone. The ballpoint clicks in and out as she pounds the buttons.

You better pick up, you little prick.

"Jason Conn." There is background noise, but he picks right up. If he'd noticed the number, he might not have.

"Hello, Jace. Where the fuck are you?" Her teeth are clenched.

"Oh, yeah, Barb, like I said I had to go out at lunch..." There is a crash in the distance, and laughter. "...ha, yeah, and I had to talk to my broker who gave me a shit tip, and well, he felt bad..."

"Jace, are you at a bar, perchance?" Her head is reeling now. No Doreen, no Danette, no Bryce, and now *this?*

"Well, yeah, ahem, yes, Barb, as a matter of fact, I'm thinking I might not make it back in today, um, I think I might go see how Dani's doing and..." He sounds lit!

"Do you even know what hospital she's at? Jace? Do you?"

"Ah, New England Medical. Yeah, I drove her down there one time."

"That's where her ObGyn is, you asshole. You better not come back today." She can't believe she's saying this, but she's losing control. She could do it all *herself!* "You'll just get in my way."

"Uh-huh, well, OK, then I'll see you tomorrow prob'ly. 'Bye."

***

Barb works like the old days. She finishes the memo and the timeline and has everything ready to copy by 5:15. Damn you're good, she smiles to herself, flying on the rush of the deadline. Now it's time to come down, though, girl. She shuts down her PC, and Bryce's, and Danette's, and *that prick's,* and gets her coat from the closet; she notices Danette's still hanging there. Poor kid, she thought, she'll miss it. She looks up at the clock. 5:35. She can make the 6:30 meeting at Powderhouse Square, no problem. She lets the door lock behind her as she leaves the empty office. A phone rings – once, twice, three times, voice mail.

As she exits the building, she feels the snap of the February chill on her face. She steps out into the crosswalk, and a cabbie rolls on through without stopping. She slams

a fist down on his trunk, but he is oblivious. You've got to be serene, Barb. The day is done. You did good work for them; now you have to do some for yourself. She fights the wind down to Park Street and boards the Red Line.

She finds a seat since the city has mostly emptied. She closes her eyes, and tries to control her breathing. Slow down, slow down. At Charles the train slides to a halt, and she opens her eyes. Across the tracks, she sees Danette standing on the platform, huddled in her little skirt suit. Damn it! I should have been more compassionate, she thinks, should have walked her out. The girl'd have her coat, at least. When did I become cold? She gets up from her seat, feet turning toward the doors just as they close.

A loud young guy on a cell phone engaged in self-important conversation about unfiltered microbrewed beer interrupts her regret as the train pulls away. Thwarted, she turns and retakes her seat. He flashes a smile that reminds her of Jason. That little bastard! She'd make him pay. 'See you tomorrow, prob'ly!' What a fucking waste of oxygen he is! The more the man in front of her postulates on the relative merits of Cascade and Tettnang hops, the stronger her distaste for Jason becomes, aggravating her resentment for being abandoned. He pushes his way out at Harvard (big surprise!), still jabbering about hops.

She steps up to the sidewalk at Davis; it's full dark now and colder away from the city. She waits a few minutes for the 94 bus, but it's nearing 6:15. She can make it just in time if she walks now. She heads up College Avenue; the streets are full of young student types, many on phones, paying attention only to themselves. As she passes through Tufts Park, she can see the rotary and the lights of Broadway. Corner of Bay State, salvation for the night. Hot coffee and sympathetic eyes.

She emerges from the park onto Broadway. She sees the church ahead, two blocks up, past the neon and ersatz gas lamps. She ducks her head, steps right to avoid a group making plans, and swings wide into the doorway to avoid decapitation by gesticulation, her hand finding a handle and pulling open the door. It is warm, smoky, and dimly lit; there are few inhabitants tonight. Tom Brokaw is mouthing today's script on the television.

She stops, looking up at the lighted clock—6:30 on

the button. She sighs and slips her bag from her shoulder, taking off her coat as she moves toward an empty stool. A phone rings—once, twice, three times, a man answers, "Jack's Tavern." A newly poured pint glows amber in the pilsner backlit under the tap, bubbles rising to billow the silky foam crown of a golden parachute.

I NEVER LIKED ICE CREAM MUCH AS A CHILD

By Steven Berbeco

I never liked ice cream much as a child, regardless of its color. Ice cream was something unreal to me, a textureless cold stuff. I didn't think much of the cones and cups. To my mind ice cream was a chilling mush, a super-sweet slow-down, the incessant, atonal musings of that truck. It was children throwing down toys and bicycles, every game coming to a sudden halt. Ice cream was parents checking the time until dinner, small and hungry eyes jealous for the colors and swirls of what was in someone else's hand. Ice cream meant that one of us would end up crying.

Sometimes ice cream smelled of the truck's diesel exhaust, sometimes of the plastic wrappers and deep-freeze frostbite burn. Sometimes ice cream dripped onto a new jersey and sometimes we got a whipping for dropping it on the pavement. But it was never our fault. The sun melted the ice cream and made it drip. The sun blinded us and made us trip over a stone that wasn't there. I imagined what the summer would be like without ice cream, with the cheering happiness of tag games and tadpole collection, without the hysteria of sugar politicking of parents and insatiable desire to possess and swallow unnaturally brilliant colors.

RECOVERY

By Ingrid Alana

You really cannot complain. You have a benign husband and you survived the malignant cancer. Although you've remotely considered going to therapy (because there are still some enduring psychological effects of the hysterectomy), the mere thought of bearing your soul to a stranger immobilizes you. Not to mention acknowledging that what happened three years ago is still very much in the present tense.

Tim works long hours so that you can dedicate yourself to your writing. Yet, you have not been able to shape one word of the novel you aptly entitled *Caustic Causes*. You consume a significant amount of white wine everyday instead of writing, in lieu of therapy. Roaming from room to room, you sip distillates from Southern Australia or Italy or France, wondering how you could possibly blame him for your inability to create.

When you were diagnosed with ovarian cancer, Tim wept openly in the doctor's office. Other than this image of him on D-day (what you most commonly refer to as the day of your diagnosis), all you draw is a blank from this vacancy in your mind-space. When you finally manage, some indeterminate number of days later, to review the information packet on your upcoming procedure, the term "hysterectomy" strikes you as odd. *Ectomy* you understand as the removal part, but its *hyster* prefix is more elusive. You come to the conclusion that it must be short for hysterical—the doctors will remove your hysterical organs—but are they hysterical in the frantic sense or in a side-splittingly funny way? You cannot remember the last time you felt either.

Tim takes a month off from work to nurse you back to health after the surgery. His office staff regularly sends exquisite floral arrangements and gourmet fruit baskets to your home. You lie on the bed and watch as the bright, lively flowers droop, dry and fall to the floor; the glossy fruit turns brown and moldy before you will allow him to remove the baskets from the bedroom. The smell of death clings to the cloth wallpaper and you wrap yourself up in it.

Your stomach, no longer propped up by what you thought were permanent residents of the lower level, falls slack and useless. Tim does his best to encourage your recuperation with comfort foods, sustenance for an aching soul. Yet, hunger seems to be a thing of the past, as well as your cravings for all things sweet. As the box of Belgian chocolates sits forsaken on the nightstand and your calls for nourishment continue to decrease, Tim turns his attention to your other senses. He entices you into hot baths, adding healing oils and scented bubbles to the water. Massaging your back, your feet, your neck and temples, he tries desperately to bring feeling back into your flesh. His fervent attentions appear a tad hysterical to you.

You stare down there as you soak in the tub, at the site of such drastic absence, and ponder the reorganization of your internal organs.

"Will there be a hostile takeover?" you abruptly ask Tim.

"At the office?" he inquires, pausing on his way to retrieve the small box of Epsom salts from the medicine cabinet.

"Not at yours, in mine," you say, pointing at the area just above the flaming red scar on your abdomen.

Your unsettling queries are often offered up to Time as matters that only He can tell. Staring night after night at the blinking blue lights on your digital alarm clock, you find Him exceedingly uncommunicative.

Your family and friends come to call often in the beginning. They gingerly sit on the edge of the bed and tell stories of women who make complete recoveries, those who move on after their operations. Your mother is appalled when during one of her visits you recklessly pull down the flannel sheet and expose your wound; scary black threads crisscross a red-raw slice hedging your incumbent pubic stubble. The train track effect is very convincing, from all sides.

You study her reaction in order to appraise your own—there is a wobbling of the chin before it falls satisfactorily ajar, accompanied by a sharp intake of air. You are less prone to these displays as the weeks pass, inevitably settling into the situation, absently nodding as your guests finish their heartfelt yet prepared speeches, dutifully returning to their cars and hastily driving away. You can't. So stay.

You take the hormone replacement pills twice every day those first six months. When Tim starts talking adoption and other options, you begin to forget. It is around this same time that he nervously reaches across the bed and lays his warm hand upon your breast. You do not move at first, cannot for the life of you recall the proper response. Had you done it before? This apparently unfamiliar act. Foreign bodies. Yours as much as his. Only when the hand silently withdraws, does its faint echo remind you.

The following afternoon, after another unsuccessful attempt at writing, at giving voice and form to formlessness, you throw the pills into the trash compactor and move yourself into the spare bedroom. Spare. Exactly, you think. When you tell Tim what you have come to, he is visibly crushed, perceptibly confounded. Only Time can tell, you say.

Just the other day you notice a long, thick hair sprouting from your chin. You do not cut it off; it tells the story of depleted female hormones, bereft of the organs that once produced them. The hysterical organs that made you a woman. They offered you monthly reminders of your sex; dripping bloody clots of liverous tissue. Paradoxical messages written in red.

You can no longer recall what stopped you from having children before the cancer, but now that you never will, their impossible lives loom over you. Insatiable spirits, they follow you around the house, nagging at you to play with them, seeking all your energy and attention. It is they who make you desert Tim, coveting the intimacy you once reserved for him. Their insubstantial hands urge you into the wine cellar, compel you to drink until your head spins in oxymoronic imagery: barren motherhood, diseased affection, teeming emptiness.

You are sometimes shocked at how you arrived at this place, more often not. The complications are ultimately uncomplicated. You are pleased that you never utter the cutting words or shout the foul language that still rises from the pit of your gut. Tim slowly slips away. You are comforted when, after awhile, he simply lets go altogether, quits trying to get back in. You stop hating him.

You in your room. Tim in his.

You consider this moving on. A complete recovery.

Until the day. You sit quietly in the corner booth of the *Mandarin House*, awaiting the pineapple pieces and fortune cookie that complete your weekly shopping routine. The spiciness of the General Tso's chicken is soothed by the sweetness of the marinated fruit. Your waiter, upon arriving with the small dessert plate, informs you that in gratitude for your steadfast patronage, they have included a Chinese delicacy, the litchi, as a small token of their appreciation. He places the plate in front of you, bends politely, and vanishes into the recesses of the restaurant.

Your eyes rest some moments on the novel arrangement. In the center of the dish is a delicate mound of the familiar yellow cubes. At either side of this nucleus a white flesh-like protuberance, the litchi nut, has been precisely placed. The two oval sacks possess tinges of pink where their piths were evidently removed. The traditional fortune cookie is nestled at the base of this assembly, its ends pointing downward. It looks like a frown when not considered in relation to the other items on your plate. An opening when taken as part of the whole—the entrance into the female reproductive system: pineapple uterus, squishy litchi ovaries, and vaginal walls with a cookie crunch. You have just been served.

In silence you reach into your pocketbook, pull out a twenty-dollar-bill and watch as it falls to rest on top of the seething silhouette. Your departure cannot be classified as delicate. You lurch awkwardly from the booth and out the glass doors. Unfortunately, you do not get very far. Your stomach heaves twice before propelling its lunch onto the pitch of the parking lot. A mushroom cloud of sour steam billows into the cold air, clutching at the ends of your dangling hair. Cresting the wave of nausea, you hesitantly raise your head. A mother, protectively restraining her inquisitive five-year-old, suspiciously regards you. You run.

Headlong. Recklessly. Until harsh concrete turns to grass and bowed branches supplant accusing streetlamps. Past berry-bearing shrubs, through barbed thickets. Finally flanking a golf course. Its rolling, manicured knolls and green-carpeted hills beckon you in. A deserted landscape in the dwindling sun, in the bitter autumn breeze. Barren yet fertile grounds abound. A flooding of kinship surges up from the austere space below your belt and forces you down

onto your knees. Pointed pine needles and frozen maple leaves, scattered by the sharp winds, shatter under the pressure. Their breaking invites your own. Tears soon form and fall over the meniscus of your lower lids, leaving a damp trail down your cheeks as you lean forward, yet closer, in communion with the hardened earth. You turn your head and press a burning ear against the frozen ground to hear some sound, to feel a pulse other than your own thrashing rhythms.

Removing your coat in the hallway and forcing it into the over-crowded closet, you hear a small snapping sound. You tentatively reach into one of the pockets and draw out a broken fortune cookie. You stare at it in your palm. A paper message peeks out. Carrying the pieces cautiously to the kitchen table, you question its presence here. You determine that it must be a cookie from a previous lunch. There is no way you took the one you were served today. Unsettling images flood your heavy head.

You pour yourself a glass of wine. A second is quick to follow. It is not long before you find yourself standing outside Tim's bedroom door, cookie crumbs falling from in between your clenched fingers. You step inside. Gingerly sit on the edge of the bed, the one that you used to share. The blue glow of the digital clock illuminates a trembling hand. Time is telling you.

Opening your fist over the nightstand, you release the crumpled sliver of paper and the remaining fragments of its cookie house. It could be an important message, possibly a life-altering communiqué. The Chinese are very wise, they say. You un-wrinkle it and read: Let a smile be your umbrella.

The giggle rises slowly from the pit of your gut, gaining speed and gathering meaning on its way up, ultimately propelling you backward onto the un-made bed in a fit of laughter, clutching at your aching side, smacked silly by such ridiculousness.

After some time, you step out of your worn clothing and climb back into your husband's bed. You bury your face in the pillows, inhaling a scent once so familiar to you. You had forgotten it. Ignored it. Resisted.

Your pain and his. And the fears. Of death at first. Soon after, life.

Settling deeper into the soft bedding and gathering

the feather comforter around your tingling flesh, you listen carefully to the sounds of your house. The rhythmic tick-tick of the clock, the subterranean purr of an ancient boiler, the hushed trickle from the leaky bathroom faucet. In the midst of all this, something more. You are quite pleased when finally you are able to distinguish it. The unmistakable beating of your own hysterical heart.

SPIDERS

By Max Cluthe

For my sixteenth birthday my mother gave me one ticket for a baseball game between the Cleveland Spiders and the New York Yankees. It was going to be August 16, 1930—some day. I would go to watch Ray Chapman, a right-handed second baseman, dressed all in wool, and so close to me. He would finally take form after years of existing solely for a little over two hours each summer afternoon in the solipsistic universe of my black wood radio. Maybe he would hit a triple for me and I would cheer; and he would tip his cap in my direction to thank me, only me, the boy who loved him and the only one in the ballpark. I knew everything about him. I probably still do. He liked to drag a bunt when his team was ahead by more than three. He hit his glove twice between pitches. He pulled the ball against left-handers. He was alive.

"Now, it may rain, so don't get your hopes up about seeing him."

It was a one o'clock start. I walked over to Donny's and sat alone on his electric blue stools and ate a roast beef sandwich with mayonnaise and drank two bottles of coke. When he asked me if I wanted a third, I told him that I had someone to see.

"Then that'll be eighty-six cents and I hope she's pretty."

The ballpark was still empty at eleven in the morning but the city was overfilled with its own self. Old people wandered through downtown after finding another reason, or the same one they always found, for getting out of bed in the morning. Once outside, though, they seemed to have forgotten it. Adults at their jobs, or on their knees begging for one, waiting for the day when they will have to do neither. Kids, both younger and older than I was, celebrated summer vacation's final lap on bicycles and front stoops. This was my town, my city – the home of the Spiders. Those were my people, crawling blindly through the tunnel of their lives.

waiting for some sort of light to appear. The gates opened loudly behind me and I was the first one in my seat. I was sixteen years old that day. The sun reflected overbearingly off of the billboards and the pristine white bases. Some Yankees were stretching their legs on the green geometry of Spider Field. It was a very hazy August day. The first bead of sweat fell into my eye. The glare off of the shaving cream advertisement was painful. I was going to have trouble seeing properly.

I was strangled by cigar smoke when he came up in the bottom of the second inning. I stood silently, waiting for a triple, and I watched him strike out on three pitches. While in the field in the top of the third, he tapped his glove twenty-two times.

It smelled like low tide on the field. The gray heat made the players sluggish—slower than they moved inside of my radio. In there, you could barely see them they moved so fast. There was no end to the sweat covering their faces, gathering around their caps and collars, and turning the dirt on their pants to a solemn brown and a gray mud. The same ball was used for the first four and a half innings and the white orb became the same dense ashen color of the sky.

In the bottom of that inning, Ray Chapman came up with a three-to-nothing lead. I wiped away the cigar smoke like dust on a table. I told the fat smoking man next to me that Ray was going to bunt.

"Yeah right, kid."

I put my hand in my pocket. I was ready. The first pitch was a ball one spitter. It started at Ray's elbows and hit the plate before it crossed. The pitcher stepped off of the mound and removed his cap. He spit into his hand and it shimmered through all the haze like the first sperm that started the world rotating. Ray tapped the bat on his foot. The spitball was a terribly difficult pitch to bunt, let alone hit at all. I wanted to take back what I told the smoking man, to change seats and begin all over again, but I could not move. The impossibility of the past and the inevitability of the future can do that to a boy. The Yankees' catcher spread four fingers out and bumped them against his inner thigh. Ray didn't show bunt and the ball sailed passed the catcher, over even the umpire's head, and hit the backstop with a shallow,

meaningless thud.

Four fingers.

Inner thigh.

Ray squatted a little lower—this would be it—but the ball hit the dirt again before it even came near to his bat. Surely, no pitcher was ever foolish enough to throw a spitball with three balls and no strikes. My hand was ready. I was ready. I looked at the smoking man. He was rubbing the hairy arms of the peanut girl.

Three and zero. Just to say them is enough, even now. The pitcher spit heavily into his hand again, rubbed it all over the baseball. The color of the sky was gray—like ashes.

"Look out, Ray," I said.

Ray Chapman looked at me then. He saw me. As he stepped out of the batter's box to take some pretentious practice swings, our eyes collided. He placed the bat on his shoulder and turned towards the plate again, but before he stepped back in he faced me—I was frozen—and tipped his cap to me.

"Sit down, kid," the smoking man told me.

The catcher threw his four fingers forcefully down and against himself. The ball left the pitcher's hand slowly. It seemed as though I had time to absorb everything and absolve nothing: the static sky, the smoking man knocking over his beer as he pulled the peanut girl to his lap, the first base coach leaning his hands on his knees; the sound came dreamily. The fish store of the field—all that waiting and it was all over; that sound; that lifetime in one pitch; that natural sound.

Ray Chapman's body spun completely around and rose in the air as if it were performing the most ancient dance. He landed on his head. His bat rolled into the Spiders' dugout and reverberated on the pavement throughout the silent ballpark. Everyone else stood up.

No one came out to help him. I don't think that he even moved when the ball shot straight towards his face, save for the slight shift of his head. His eyes met mine again in that moment. There was no moment of recognition. The spitball snapped the bone beside his eye socket and prevented him from hearing me whisper—

"Don't get up, Ray. Don't get up. Don't get up."

But he did.

Ray Chapman got to his feet awkwardly and instinctively began to walk towards first base. The crowd hesitantly applauded twice, once for each step he took. Then he fell again, collapsed really. This time he did not get up. The umpire called for some players to take him away, and they did, and Spiders carried his body into centerfield. It was there that Ray Chapman died on August sixteenth, beneath the sky of ashes in downtown Cleveland, leaving me with nothing but a ticket stub and my uncle's gun in my back pocket.

GIVE IT THE GAS

By Eric Brown

I was lying on the cot in the sleeping porch, listening to the rain fall on the roof, when I heard footsteps approach. Now the *thuda, thuda* of the roof rain was mixed with the clomp of brogans on wood. "Time to hit the road," Gramps bellowed. He filled the doorway in front of me, tucking his shirt in. "Do you need to go to the tarlet?" I nodded and stood up. "Well come on then, we're killing daylight."

"How can we kill daylight if it's raining," I said, following him down the hall.

"It's still daylight," he said. "How do you think you can see?"

"I can't see. I'm blind," I said, closing my eyes and holding my arms out in front of me.

"Now that's a darned shame," Gramps said, steering me into the bathroom. "Don't fall in!"

Outside, we walked to the garage on pink stepping stones that were fringed with wet grass. Rainwater dribbled over the edge of the stucco bird fountain.

"Get the lead out," Gramps said, holding the car door open. "You're as slow as a first grader."

"I'm in second grade," I corrected, jumping off the big log to go tumbling in the grass. Then I had to jump again.

I jumped onto the front seat of the station wagon and slammed the door, loving the deep heaviness of the sound. "Give it the gas," Gramps ordered, and as I pushed hard on the cigarette lighter, the car's engine rumbled to life.

Humb! Swish! Humb! Swish! The wipers cleared the windshield, but only for a moment before the view dissolved into a rainy smudge. With another swish, I could see the road, but then it disappeared. In the next moment, everything was clear again. When we stopped at the corner, ready to turn, the car went Humb! Swish! Click, click, click, Humb!

"Looks like we've got a Messerschmitt on our tail," Gramps said, eyeing the rear view mirror. "Better hit him with our twenty-millimeter."

"Roger," I said, and punched a radio button. "Got him!"

"Good shootin'" he said. "Now it's time to refuel."

We drove up to a banking window and Gramps leaned over to speak slowly into the microphone, his voice full and nasal, as if he were munching and swallowing each word. The scratchy voice that came back didn't sound like it belonged to the pretty lady inside. A metal drawer sprang out from the building toward us and Gramps put some papers in and shoved it back in. The rain water poured off the sides of the overhang around us, and it seemed like we were in a room that had walls made of water. The box popped out again, and Gramps removed a handful of bills. "Look," Gramps said and pulled a red sucker from the box and handed it to me. The lady behind the glass smiled and waved, and I waved back. As we pulled away, a man came up behind her and she stopped smiling.

We drove downtown, listening to some music. The news came on, and a man was talking about the war in Vietnam and how one thousand seven hundred and forty two had died. "Bunch of damned idiots," Gramps said, and I was going to ask him who he meant, but then I saw a mutt walking down the sidewalk. He didn't seem to care about the rain and he stopped to paw at something in the gutter.

We parked in front of a hardware store and Gramps went in. From where I sat I could see him through the glass door, talking to a clerk who was wearing a dirty apron. When Gramps disappeared from view I felt lonely and a bit cold. It was sad looking at the empty old warehouses with the rain on them. Wet people hurried down the slanting street carrying umbrellas, trying to catch a bus. The bus started off without them and one of the men yelled a swear word. The bus stopped to let them on and then drove away behind a white cloud of exhaust. I looked the other way and saw a dark-skinned man walking down the street toward me. His shoulders were hunched and his hands were stuffed into his pockets. He turned to look at me, his eyes narrowing. He looked like a man I had just seen on TV during the riots, a man who was throwing a rock through a window. Maybe it was the same man and he had seen me back through the TV. I was afraid for a second, but then he cracked a sideways smile at me, and he pulled his hands from his pocket and

continued walking down the street.

Gramps came back with a wet bag full of parts, and we drove to the art gallery. As we stopped at a light, I saw a bearded man with hair down to his shoulders. He wore a necklace and his coat had fringe on it. "Look!" I said to Gramps. "A cowboy!"

"Nope, that's a hippie!" Gramps said, as we drove on.

"What's a hippie?" I asked, turning around to watch the man as he crossed the street.

"It's a bum who likes flowers," he said. I sort of knew what a bum was, but I didn't see that this one had any flowers. I was going to ask Gramps another question about the hippie, but now he was complaining about the traffic, so I left him alone.

We parked near the art gallery, and hurried through the rain past a big statue of a naked man with his fist under his chin. Gramps said it was called The Thinker and that he was trying to remember where he left his clothes. Inside, we came to a room that had high ceilings and huge paintings with big blocks of bright colors. I liked the paintings at first, but then I got bored and I looked out the window at the wet courtyard. A black bird sat on a statue of a girl who was staring at her feet.

Later, we walked down marble halls past old paintings and the voices from down the hall echoed so that they sounded kind of shifty. As Gramps walked on ahead, I stopped to look at a dark painting of a naked lady with angels at her feet. She was squeezing one of her boobies and some juice shot all the way across the painting and into the mouth of a baby on the other side. "God," I said, trying to figure out how she could do that and why she would want to. I heard a grunt and turned to see a gray-haired guard a few feet behind me giving me the hairy eyeball. I hurried to catch up with Gramps.

Farther down the hall we came to my favorite part: the red telephones. I picked up a phone and a lady talked to me. I put it down and then picked it up again and the same lady kept talking, as if I had never stopped listening. I wondered what would happen if I talked back, but I was afraid she might answer, so I didn't say a word.

Afterward, we drove to the library where I rushed

over to the kids' section. The librarian stopped me with her long painted fingernails. She grabbed my shoulders and leaned over to look me in the eyes. "Slow down," she said softly and slowly, her mouth opening wide so I could see her tonsils.

I nodded quickly and then walked slowly over to the picture books. I opened a book about World War II airplanes and put my nose deep into the spine and sniffed. It smelled nice, and the pictures looked good, with brightly colored planes flying through blue skies.

After awhile, Gramps sat down next to me. "What do you have there?" he asked in a soft library voice.

"Planes," I said. As I turned the pages Gramps said a little bit about each plane.

"Flying Fortress," he said, nodding. "That's one tough bomber; you couldn't shoot through that." Then I turned the page again, this time to a skinny plane with long wings. "Reconnaissance plane," he said in a ragged voice, like he needed a glass of water. "Scouts out the enemy."

Gramps stared at the picture and his mouth and nose were mixed up in a kind of sneer. He placed his hands on his knees, like he needed to use his arms to keep the top part of his body from falling over.

"What's wrong, Gramps?" I asked.

"Nothing," he said, taking a deep breath and letting it out. Then he looked at me the way the big kids do when they size up players to choose for their team. "Can you keep a secret?"

"Sure," I said, though from the broken look on his face I wasn't so sure I wanted to hear his secret. He gave me a little nod and looked off down an aisle of books.

"Back in Italy during the war, I was in charge of fueling a plane just like that," he said. "You know, there's a certain kind of oxygen to breathe and there's another kind to mix in the fuel..." He paused and took a big sniff like he had a cold. "Well, I guess I got them mixed up." Gramps pressed his lips together, as if something hurt inside. I saw that his eyes were watery, and then it hit me that he was making the face so that he wouldn't cry. "Three of my buddies died in the crash, and it was all my fault."

Gramps stared across the library, his face still holding in his tears. I didn't know what to say and I thought I

might start crying myself. I just wanted to be out of there, away from Gramps and his horrible face. He wouldn't have told the story if I hadn't picked up the book. Why did I open this stupid book? I closed the book, and it dropped to the floor. "I'm sorry, Gramps," I said and covered my eyes with my hands to try to keep the tears back in. But the tears slipped out the sides and dripped down my cheeks.

Gramps put his arm around me. "You've got nothing to be sorry about," he said, then cleared his throat. "I'm the one who's sorry." I looked up and saw that his face had begun to relax now. Only a sad smile was left. "I made a big mistake, but there's not much I can do about it," he said. "All I can do is try hard not to make any other big mistakes. I've done pretty good so far."

I wiped my eyes with the bottom of my shirt and I looked up into his eyes, which were almost back to normal. I knew that he was telling the truth. I looked around to see if any of the other kids had seen me crying, but nobody had noticed me. I looked at a boy who was reading a dinosaur book. He was probably a year older than me, but I knew that he had never heard the sort of story I had just heard. If he had, his face would have looked different, the way I imagined my face looked now.

Gramps stood up and I could hear a little creaking sound from inside his bones. "Okay, then, did you want to check out a book?" he asked.

"I don't think so," I said. "Not today."

Outside, the rain had stopped and the sun started to shine from behind a messy break-up of clouds. "Time to return to base," Gramps said. "Give her the gas." I pressed the cigarette lighter and the car started. The car was hot now, and we drove with the windows down and our elbows sticking out.

CLUB TANGIBLE

By Evan Sicuranza

Club Tangible is the best. No muss, no fuss. Here, everyone is perfect and dances alone.

The most popular dance is the Body Builder; we pose and flex all night long to songs by bands like Muscle Head or The Triceps Connection.

We are beautiful, glistening girls and boys in silver underwear, wet with oil and anticipation. We are immaculate, marbled by circling lights of blue and white.

Enormous television sets play programs on cardiovascular exercises, advanced training tapes detailing how to squat, how to lift, how to sculpt the body and make it grow wings.

Mirrors behind the bar reflect an assortment of figures in motion, saturated and made new in stunning Technicolor—the pigments of private acts, over-exposed and ripening, already halfway to rot.

In glass cases along the wall: human specimens on display.

On Saturdays, the club is an inferno. Gas jets sprout flames from walls and floor. The dancers shave their bodies, all except the Shaggies, for whom the smell of singed hair is an aphrodisiac.

In the front room a man named Paul is sweating, and his sweat is like honey. He tastes it on his lips; it is thick and sweet. He orders a drink, a "lipstick whistler." He is pale, tall, and toothpick thin, and he stands by the bar.

When his drink arrives, he takes it between the pads of his thumb and forefinger and sips at it gently. He milks it with his lips, coating his teeth, curling his tongue. He is a Mouth Boy.

His face grows flush, blooming with red smudges. This is a drink which makes the lips swell and all words come out soft and round.

In this state, speaking is an act of foreplay.

Paul looks for someone to talk to. His sensitive

mouth demands the tactile pleasure of plosives, the teasing purr of *r* and *m*, the postcoital stroke of tender vowels. His mouth is in heat for conversation.

William is in a corner. He is a Muscle Man, all neck and arms and legs twitching like eels, slippery and strong. His body burns for motion.

William crouches and tenses. He feels the strain as a white heat, coursing through him like a drug.

For him, the muscles are lyrical. He pulses with sonnets and madrigals.

William needs to perform.

Soon, Paul will approach William. Paul will speak, the words tasting like salt and wine and flame. William will grunt, his body contracting and releasing in a violent language of its own.

William will take Paul back to his place on the riverside. William's rusted houseboat sunk in mud. The river will be dark and wide, its water cold and consuming.

William will recite poetry with his body, limbs twisting in obscene verse. Paul will translate.

The words will cause him to tremble. He will paw at them, nibble them, bite, suck, and fuck them. Paul will shake in climax on the floor.

William's muscles will revel in motion. He will grow excited and expand and be glorious in hyper-tension.

The night will be endless; the dawn will never come. The river will rise, the water will have hands reaching everywhere.

William's muscles will grow and the stress will break them. They will burst like balloons.

And Paul, his skin will be like paper and the words will cover him in blackness, smother him. He will suffocate in ecstatic spasms. He will dissipate, nullified by his own voice.

There will be nothing left of him but his lips. They will be huge, engorged by all the blood of broken life.

William, weakly, with the last of his strength, will take the lips in his arms and carry them outside.

He will throw the lips into the river where they will bob on the waves like inflatable pool toys, picked at by gulls and pigeons.

Then William will collapse in the mud. The water will cover him and he will be extinguished.

Back at Club Tangible, the gas jets will explode, sending waves of flame across the dance floor.

The hair will burn off the Shaggies; the floor will be dusted with ash. The underwear will burn off the Muscle Men; their muscles will throb and expand, will shine like golden bullets. The lips will burn off the Mouth Boys and wilt like old flowers.

Nothing will be left but bodies. The bodies will be pure. The bodies will be gods. The bodies will dance, and the music will be forgotten, and the bodies will continue to dance.

At last, the bodies will also burn. The fire will take them and they will be flaming, perfect suns. They will be meat. They will burn as only bodies burn, with that peculiar exhilaration.

The glass cases will burst, the specimens will be raging works of art.

As I burn, I will think of Paul and William and of dangerous dances and the wages of love, my thoughts as clear as the sign on the wall that says:

Club Tangible is closed. Club Tangible wins.
Saturday is over.

UNTITLED
Printmaking
By Daniel Rodriguez

HASTA LA VICTORIA SIEMPRE
Printmaking
By Daniel Rodriguez

CHANCELLOR GORA
Acrylic Painting
By DS Mangus

ASPARAGUS TRIPTYCH
Acrylic Painting
By Bernadette McHugh

SOUL'S TURMOIL AND DEATH,
DESCENDING STAIR
Acrylic & Pencil
By Hallie Lee

RED PEPPER
Acrylic Painting
By Paola Batti

THE FIELD
Acrylic Painting
By Paola Batti

LADY WITH FLOWER
Pastel Drawing
By Michael Rhys

WOMAN AND SHOULDER
Acrylic Painting
By Thomas Barker

UNTITLED
Acrylic Painting
By Thomas Barker

THE IDIOT
Acrylic Painting
By Thomas Barker

HYPPOLITE CH. I/ WINGS
Color Photography/ Black & White Photography
By Steve Osemwenkhae

SIMPLY OUTSTANDING, SOS/
THE PHOTOGRAPHER
Black & White Photography
By William Howell

SELF PORTRAIT WITH WHALE MASK I & II
Black & White Photography
By Daniel Willig

CHICKEN I & II
Black & White Photography
By Daniel Willig

BREAKFAST, AMSTERDAM

Color Photography

By Bucky

ALIGNMENT II/ MEADOW I
Color Photography
By Bucky

BARRIO I & II

Color Photography

By Ekaterina Naumova

TIDEWAY/ STORM FENCE

Color Photography

By Jeanne Kent

LADIES FROM BEHIND

Printmaking

By Melissa Nelson

UNTITLED
Printmaking
By Patrick Merrill

UNTITLED
Printmaking
By Alicia Posen

JACQUES
Printmaking
By Alicia Posen

UNTITLED
Printmaking
By David Pereira

UNTITLED
Printmaking
By David Pereira

FLOWER
Printmaking
By Dewi Simanjuntak

BAMBOO
Printmaking
By Dewi Simanjuntak

THEIR CYCLE I, II, & VII

Printmaking

By Joed Polly

UNTITLED
Printmaking & Digital Media
By Eleni K. Balasalle

CUERVO
Digital Media
By Justin Hughes

A SUBSTANTIAL DISPUTE: SPINOZA & LEIBNIZ

By Ilhan Zeybekoglu

One can only imagine the conversational content of Leibniz's four day encounter with Spinoza in the winter of 1676. In a letter to Arnauld written twelve years later, Leibniz says of Spinoza that "he is full of fantasies, and his so called demonstrations in 'Of God' don't even look like proofs" (Leibniz 136). Though the two men belong, with Descartes, to the 'Rationalist' tradition—the breed of philosophy which maintains that human reason is both capable and competent of arriving at the fundamental truths which constitute the nature of reality (i.e. the metaphysical underpinnings of the universe)—their theories indeed differ substantially. Perhaps one clue as to why this is the case is that Spinoza and Leibniz approach the task of conducting a metaphysical inquiry in different sorts of ways. Spinoza, following Descartes, thought that the best way to discover the true nature of reality was to first make a clean break from the philosophy of the past. If we begin from principles that are clearly and distinctly true, and do not postulate any which are not, we may by reason derive from these principles further truths about the nature of reality.[1] This technique underlies the geometrical method which Spinoza employs in *Ethics*. Leibniz, on the other hand, regularly borrows not only from Spinoza and Descartes, but from the Scholastics as well. His was an attempt to reconcile the new science which was grounded in mechanics, with that of the Scholastics, who posited teleological principles as the foundation of natural substances. For Leibniz, the world of physics is describable in terms of efficient or mechanical causes; the world of substances, however, is governed by final causes; it was a mistake on the part of the Scholastics to ascribe these latter sorts of causes to the domain of natural science (phenomena for Leibniz).

Spinoza posits that only one substance, infinite substance, viz., God, exists and exists necessarily. Needless to say, Spinoza rejects the notion that final causes govern anything, let alone substance, which for Spinoza is the im-

manent cause of all things (Proposition 18); i.e. all things are in God. The infinite universe simply is God expressed in an infinite number of ways; i.e., he may be expressed (characterized) as infinite thought or infinite extension or any other possible attribute[2], but these are all characterizations of one and the same substance. Spinoza defines substance as, 'that which is in itself and conceived through itself,' but does not (as Leibniz may) take for granted its existence. It is not until Proposition 7 of *Ethics* that he demonstrates that existence belongs to, and moreover is the essence of substance. Infinite substance alone is dependent upon no other being for its existence; i.e., it alone is in itself and conceived through itself and may therefore be called substance. Finite beings are dependent upon infinite substance for their conception, and thereby cannot themselves be substances, but rather modes of substance, since substance is prior to its affections (Spinoza, Proposition 1). Thus, all substance must be infinite for Spinoza, and since according to P5, there cannot exist two substances of the same nature, two or more beings of infinite nature could not be said to be numerically distinct. If this is the case, no substance other than God can possibly exist. Interestingly, Leibniz espouses the Spinozistic view that no two beings can be said to be distinct if they do not possess some qualitative difference (his Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles), but for Leibniz it does not follow that there exists only one substance, but an infinite number of substances, all of which are numerically distinguishable by virtue of their perceptions.

Substance for Spinoza as for Leibniz is indivisible; for Spinoza however, it is in virtue of the fact that it is infinite that it is indivisible. Hence corporeal substance for Spinoza (i.e., God conceived of under the attribute of extension) is indivisible in so far as it is infinite. Leibniz, on the other hand, especially in his later writings, maintains that the fundamental beings of which reality is composed must themselves be simple, i.e. indivisible, and thus cannot be corporeal in nature, since matter according to Leibniz is divisible ad infinitum. This notion he borrows from Descartes. To say of a being that it is material or extended is to say that it possesses length, breadth and depth. Conceptually, any being which met these requirements, no matter how small, would be divisible into parts, e.g. a top part and a bottom part, a left part

and a right part, etc. Now to speak of simple substance is to speak of that which is without parts (Leibniz, Proposition 1). Hence it follows that simple substances must be non-material sorts of things, or they would not be simple. "Now, in that which has no parts, neither extension, nor shape nor divisibility is possible. And so monads are the true atoms of nature; in a word the elements of things" (Leibniz, Proposition 3).

Spinoza agrees that to speak of that which is divisible is to speak of that which is made up of parts, but he contends that it makes no sense to say of corporeal substance that it comprises parts (Spinoza, Proposition 15). If it were composed of parts, it would be possible to remove or destroy any part which stood on its own. But this is absurd: what could it possibly mean to remove or destroy a part of infinite extension? I can destroy a table, but in doing so I do not destroy the corresponding region of space which it occupies. Infinite extension remains, only now a particular region of space is qualified differently. Leibniz, however, is of the view that our notions of space and time are merely logical ways in which our finite minds grasp the relations among things. On this view, Spinoza is putting the cart before the horse. It is not the case that the region of space is prior to the table, but rather we posit the region of space because of the relations in which the table stands to other objects.[3]

It is not wholly agreed upon whether the views which dominate Leibniz's metaphysics during his late career can be reconciled with the views he espoused in his earlier writings. For instance, Leibniz often writes as though matter does in fact exist and is conjoined with form to produce simple substances. Though matter itself is passive throughout Leibniz's writings, when form is imposed upon or linked up with the matter, the result, on one reading of Leibniz's earlier texts, is a simple substance. This is not the case in his later monad-dominated philosophy. By the time he wrote the *Monadology* (1714), so close to his death, Leibniz clearly held that monads alone may be called substances (from the Greek word *monas*, meaning unity, or that which is one), and that monads lack material properties. There are two possible ways to account for this: either Leibniz simply rejected his earlier view in his later writings or he never believed that there were such things as material substances; such beings

are only substances nominally, not real substances. Reticently, I am inclined towards the later of these interpretations, only in so far as it is charitable to Leibniz; i.e., in so far as it reconciles his earlier writings with his later ones.

I do not, however, ascribe to Leibniz that he is a pure phenomenalist (or at least in the way that we may say of Bishop Berkeley that he was a phenomenalist). In Berkeley's universe, all that exist are a plurality of minds and their perceptions, harmonized by God. On this account, there exists no mind-independent reality. Indeed Leibniz explicitly rejects the idea that this is the case. For Leibniz, all monads are soul-like beings which do not interact causally with one another, i.e. they are "windowless." But not all soul-like beings are minds for Leibniz, only those monads which are more advanced may be called minds. All monads have perceptions, or internal states, but in order for it to be called a mind, a monad must also have apperception, or reflective awareness of its perceptual states. "Apperception is not given to all souls, and is not given to particular souls all the time" (Leibniz 260). From this it is clear that monads may have perceptions without apperception; the Cartesians failed to draw this distinction. For Descartes all non-material substances are minds. Leibniz, on the other hand, posits a mind-independent reality composed of non-physical entities, not all of which can be called minds. This is certainly a form of immaterialism, but it is not quite the sort of phenomenalism that is found in Berkeley (as some have suggested).

Monads do not interact causally with one another; rather "the action of one finite substance on another consists only in an increase in the degree of its expression combined with a decrease in that of the other, God having formed them in advance in such a way that they fit together" (Leibniz 67). In other words, since monads are "windowless," apparent causality amounts to synchronized perceptual changes which take place within respective substances. This explication of the Leibnizian doctrine of pre-established harmony is analogous to the Spinozistic doctrine of the incommensurability of modes which express different attributes of God. For Spinoza, modes of extension are caused only by other extended modes, never by modes of thought and vice versa. It is not the case that an act of will is the cause of bodily action, e.g. the raising of one's arm; rather, the bodily action is

caused by e.g. some neural firings in the brain, an extended mode which is concomitant with some mode of thought, an act of will. These events (the act of will and the neural firings) are in fact modally identical for Spinoza (i.e., a mode of extension simply is a mode of thought expressed differently), but we cannot say that the mode of thought caused the mode of extension since beings with different attributes have nothing in common with one another, and thus one cannot be the cause of the other (Spinoza, Propositions 2 & 3). So the act of will happens in the realm of thought and the neural firings in the realm of extension, but the former does not cause the latter. They are parallel events with modal identity, but they are not explainable in terms of one another, only in terms of the prior events which took place under their respective attributes.[4] Similarly, for Leibniz, the perceptual states of monads may change in such a way that it would appear that one is the cause of the other, when in fact there is no causal interaction whatever between them. Perceptual changes within monads are caused by a predetermined organizing principle within the monad, not by monads external to it.

Though the perceptual changes within monads are predetermined by a necessary and benevolent God, and our minds thus set on a definite course, Leibniz does not deny human freedom. We are free when the contrary of our action is conceptually possible in itself. Spinoza, on the other hand, holds that because the universe is determinate, "Will cannot be called a free cause, but only a necessary cause" (Spinoza, Proposition 32). Here it is helpful to draw a distinction which is relevant both for Spinoza and for Leibniz between absolute and hypothetical necessity. To say of a statement that it is absolutely necessary is to say that its contrary implies a contradiction. To say that it is hypothetically necessary, or necessary ex hypothesi, is to say that it is not logically, but accidentally the case, i.e. it could have been otherwise. "I say that what happens in accordance with its antecedents is definite, but it is not necessary; if anyone did the contrary, he would not be doing anything impossible in itself, although it is (ex hypothesi) impossible that it should happen...But nothing is necessary if its opposite is possible" (Leibniz 65). Leibniz says that an action is free if it is the case that acting otherwise would not involve a logical contradiction. What is odd about this is that he says it is definite that we must act

in a certain way. This is certainly not a conventional notion of freedom. For Spinoza, the universe is a determinate one wherefrom all things follow of necessity (albeit hypothetical necessity where human beings are concerned). But the fact that we act of necessity ex hypothesi is enough to say that we are not free for Spinoza. The question becomes: is there any difference between Spinoza and Leibniz here other than what they choose to call hypothetically necessary actions? Spinoza says that they are determined, Leibniz that they are free; but it seems that Spinoza's choice of language makes his theory the more conceptually satisfying of the two.

Leibniz's in-esse principle states that all predicates are contained in a subject eternally. God forms each individual monad such that its predicates, i.e. its built in perceptual states, will allow it to participate in, i.e., conform to, a world that is the best possible. "So the subject term must always involve that of the predicate, in such a way that anyone who understood the subject notion perfectly would also see the predicate belongs to it...[this would] allow the deduction of, all the predicates of the subject to which that notion is attributed" (Leibniz 59-60). If this is the case, it seems strange to say that we are free. If all perceptual states which belong to monads are eternally determined, such that complete knowledge of any one would involve knowledge of all of its internal states past, present and future, it would seem that any state contrary to those which it comprises would contradict its essence, much like squareness contradicts the essence of a circle. I feel that by tacitly redefining freedom, Leibniz is avoiding the problem rather than addressing it. If we are to maintain a conventional view of freedom, it would appear we are fated to accept Spinoza's determinism.

According to Leibniz, "each substance is like a whole world, and like a mirror of God, or indeed of the whole universe, which each one expresses in its own fashion...it expresses, albeit confusedly, everything which happens in the universe, past, present and future, and this has some resemblance to an infinite perception or understanding" (Leibniz 61). Each monad is predicated in an infinite number of ways which express its relations to all other monads past, present and future, no matter how vague the relation may be. In this sense the whole universe is in us, which is contrary to Spinoza's claim that we are all in the universe. To

fully grasp the nature of any particular monad is to grasp the whole universe in a particular way, or from a particular perspective. This is not completely without shades of Spinoza, though at first it may appear to be, for Spinoza too believed that the universe may be conceived in an infinite number of ways, under the different attributes of God. Each of these attributes is a different way in which one and the same universe is conceivable—just as for Leibniz, to conceive of the universe from the vantage point of different monads is to conceive of one and the same universe in different ways. In both cases, all perspectives are parallel and each is partially valid in itself, but they are incommensurable. Why this is the case for Spinoza was explained earlier. In the case of Leibniz, it is evident from his belief that no two substances can exist which are qualitatively identical. All substances must therefore be predicated in different ways. There are for both men, an infinite number of ways in which reality can be understood, but none of these on its own gives a full ontology; for that, it is necessary to know the universe in all ways possible, and this understanding is in God alone.

1. This methodology is to a great extent a consequence of the emergence of the new science which, among other things, raised doubts in the minds of its key figures about Scholastic cosmology and philosophy in general.

2. To say of a being that it possesses an infinite number of attributes is to say that it possesses all possible attributes. Thus God qua perfect being must possess all possible attributes. However, we as human beings with finite minds are only capable of grasping two of these, viz., thought and extension.

3. Jonathan Bennett (1996) gives an analogous account of this difference between Spinoza and Leibniz.

4. The arm being raised in the air can be seen as a definite result of the neural firings, but not of the act of will, even though the two are modally identical. There does however exist an event in the realm of thought which is modally identical to the arm being raised that can be said to follow conceptually from the act of will.

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WAITING VULTURES

By Peter Wal

We picked up Thokluoi. His tongue was stuck to the roof of his mouth. His skin was dry, cracked, and broken in many places. No blood was oozing from the open parts of his skin. This was very strange. To a seven-year-old boy like me, this was unnatural. Blood is supposed to flow from a human being if his skin is cut or is separated by any other means. Thokluoi was alive. Barely. I was mystified. He could not talk. His jaws were stuck together. He was extremely weak. And the sun beat down mercilessly on us in Africa's Ajahgeer Desert.

We had to put Thokluoi down. We too were extremely thirsty and weak. We did not have the strength to carry him—thin and shrunken as he was. We had not drank water in many days. We placed Thokluoi flat on his back on the scorching sand. We gathered around him so that the shadows from our bodies would protect him from the vicious heat from the sun's rays. The sun—so central to the beliefs of African people, especially to Nilotic people like me—was now a deadly enemy. It was now drying up hundreds of Sudanese boys in one of Africa's hottest deserts.

Thokluoi's eyes were bulging. We knew it was the lack of water that was killing him. We were so afraid. We did not want to look up at the sky. We did not want to see the vultures that were following us. They had been following us for days. We knew that vultures eat dead bodies—both human and animal.

Thokluoi lay on the sand, barely breathing. We knew he would die. We did not want the vultures to eat him. This was such a sad and terrible way for an innocent child to leave this world. None of this made any sense to us. We watched Thokluoi die. We stood around his body for a while. This was the only ritual we knew how to perform for our dead brother who fled with us from our home in southern Sudan. Slowly, we walked away from his body. It was against our cultural norms not to bury our dead. The Dinka treat the dead with awe and respect. In this desert, however, we had to walk away. We were too weak to dig a grave deep enough

to protect Thokluoi from the vultures. He now belonged to these large birds with the razor-sharp beaks. They would begin by pecking out his eyes. They would then shred the rest of his body. We would lose more of our brothers this way before our more than two-thousand-mile journey would be over. The pain on seeing so many die would get worse. We would not get accustomed to the sight of so much death. The more we saw, the greater was the pain. It is terrible that death is not something that one can get used to.

We marched on weakly in the fierce heat—eight hundred boys fleeing across one of Africa's hottest deserts to escape Arab armies who were determined to kill all Africans in Sudan. I thought of my name. In some mysterious way it gave me comfort. My name is Matiop Wal. "Matiop" means "land." "Wal" means "grass" and "medicine." The images of water and vegetation that my name creates gave me hope.

Those of us who were not afraid of the bitter taste of date palm leaves chewed the leaves of these hardy, desert trees in order to keep our throats moist. If we did not, our tongues would stick to the roofs of our mouths or the back of our throats. Our "companions," the vultures, followed us. Friends in peacetime, they cleared the environment of carcasses. At terrible times like these when humans were killing other humans and nothing made sense, vultures were horrible reminders that death was our constant companion. The vultures, it seemed to us, did not know the difference between stillness and death. They would swoop down the moment any one lay motionless and try to peck at his eyes. We had to keep some part of our bodies moving to prevent this.

We kept on marching as best we could in our weakened, hungry state. It took us fifteen days to walk across that desert. We carefully kept time by observing the sunrise and sunset. We missed home. We missed the lush, green fields of our village and cattle pastures that we ran away from several weeks before when Arab armies attacked, killing everyone in sight. The Arabs also burned down our homes. Young boys in the fields tending cattle know what the sound of gunfire, falling bombs, and smoke rising to the sky means. It means that you have got to run for your life. We did that.

Before reaching the Ajahgeer Desert we had trekked through miles of dense jungle. This had its special dangers.

We had to watch out for lions, leopards, elephants, cobras, and other poisonous snakes.

The Murile people lived on the edge of the desert. They did not like the sight of almost eight hundred starving, thirsty boys approaching their community. The oldest boy in our group was thirteen. The boys between the ages of eleven and thirteen acted as our elders. They were forced to be men before they were ready. Rain was pouring in Okelo when we arrived in the town. Imagine how we felt after fifteen days in a waterless desert. All eight hundred of us sat under the trees in a public square in the town. We could not speak the language of the Murile people. They gathered around talking excitedly. We could not understand what they were saying, but their facial expressions told us that they did not want us in their town. We spent a night and a day just resting in the square.

We continued our march in search of freedom and safety. Two days later we arrived in Ajuara. We did not know that such a place and such a people existed. We just happened to arrive in this area during our march. The children of the town attacked us—kicking us and calling us bad names. They were encouraged by the adults. Dogs were encouraged to attack us. The Ajuara king finally appeared with his guards and told his subjects to leave us alone. "Shiiy! Shiiy!" the people shouted. In their language that means, "Go! Go!"

We left the Ajuara community in a hurry. We had to cross the Ajuara River on our journey to Ethiopia—a country that we were sure would take us in. The Ethiopians have a long and glorious history of being kind and hospitable to the less fortunate. The Ajuara people refused to lend us their canoes to cross this wide and dangerous river. Many of us could not swim, but we had to leave this hostile community. Those who could swim jumped in. I could not swim. Ayuen Kuei, a twelve-year-old, took my right hand and jumped into the water. I was terrified. I thought I would drown. Ayuen held me with one hand and swam with the other. I do not know how he did it, but he brought me safely to the other side. Ayuen, I thought, is what an angel looks like. Miraculously, the swimmers took all the non-swimmers safely to the other side. We had tied our shirts around our heads in order to make swimming across the river less dangerous. The more

clothes you wear, the harder it is to swim against that strong current. The current pulled the shirts off our heads. We had to travel many hundreds of miles through jungle with no shirts. Insects would bite and tear at our skin mercilessly.

It took eight days of traveling through dense jungle before we arrived at Pibor. Again, we did not know there was such a place. These were just communities we were encountering on our way to Ethiopia. By now we were very afraid of meeting other people. The Murile, as the people of this part of Africa are called, gathered around us. We thought this was going to be the end of our lives. It was a strange sight—several hundred starving boys squatting at the edge of the town with the population surrounding us. King Juang appeared with his guards. I will never forget this king. Speaking through translators he told us that he would give us ten bulls as food. He commanded the people around him to slaughter the bulls and smoke the meat and give it to us. King Juang told us that he was happy to see us alive and that we should continue our march to Ethiopia. "I do not know when the Arabs will attack this town. To be safe, you better go," he said.

We were relieved to hear the king speak like this. Later his servants would bring smoked and boiled beef for us and they wished us a safe journey to Ethiopia. That was the last community we were to meet on our sad flight from our homeland. We were to travel several hundred miles again, with bare feet and without shirts, through dense jungle. Leeches would sink their sharp teeth into our skin. We were bitten constantly by swarms of mosquitoes. The dreaded tsetse fly, which gives you sleeping sickness, bit us all during our travels through the jungle. It has to be that we had a natural immunity against the poison from the tsetse fly.

We finally reached our destination—exhausted, hungry, dehydrated, alive.

We did not know that Fate was plotting to have us make that same journey back to Sudan...

KANJI IN JAPANESE WRITING

By Tomohide Yasuda

There are many textbooks and dictionaries available from which to learn *kanji* (Chinese characters, each character symbolizing a single idea) and the Japanese writing system. Some textbooks and dictionaries extensively explain the origin, history, and structure of *kanji*. However, there is nothing to answer the question most frequently asked by beginners of Japanese: "*Kanji* are too complicated and ineffective. Why don't the Japanese abandon them?" Unfortunately, without receiving any answers to the above reasonable question, beginners simply have to accept the fact that *kanji* are still commonly used in modern Japanese and that eventually they will just have to learn *kanji* to achieve mastery of the language.

This short note tries to answer the above beginners' question from a native speaker's perspective and experience, and also tries to explain why the Japanese writing system is more efficient with *kanji* than without. It will neither review the history of *kanji* and the Japanese writing system nor will it insist upon the superiority of the system to other systems.

Visual Appeal

The underlying supposition of the above question is that abandonment of *kanji* would be desirable, but that the Japanese probably could not get rid of them because abandonment of such an ancient system would cost too much. However, it can be said that the strong visual appeal of *kanji* is the very reason why they have been used in the Japanese writing system. (It should be noted here that there have long been advocates of the romanization of the Japanese writing system even though their influence has been negligible.) Why do *kanji* have a stronger visual appeal than the Roman alphabet? To begin with, it is obvious that people can more quickly catch the meaning of a simple symbol such as than that of a notice of, "No U-turn." Each *kanji* works like this symbol shown here. By replacing key words in a text with symbols, a common Japanese text

effectively utilizes the normal pattern-recognition ability of human beings. The following example will show how *kanji* appear to native speakers of Japanese:

ヘンリ三世は金を愛した。

(In English, "Henry the Third loved money.")

This Japanese sentence uses two separate forms of phonetic syllabic script known as *katakana* and *hiragana* in combination with *kanji*. Nouns and stems of verbs are written with *kanji*. Inflectional endings, grammatical particles, and auxiliary verbs are written with *hiragana*. *Katakana* is used to write foreign words like "Henry."

Katakana (phonetic): ヘ (he), ン (n), リ (ri)

Hiragana (phonetic): は (ha), を (wo), し (shi), た (ta)

Kanji: 三 (three), 世 (generation), 金 (money), 愛 (love)

The more structured *kanji* look conspicuous in the sentence. In other words, these *kanji* are placed in sharp relief so that a reader can skim only *kanji* ("the Third," "money," and "love" in the above sentence) to quickly understand the meaning of a sentence. In order to give this feeling to a non-native speaker of Japanese, the above example may be modified with other symbols:

Henry III ♥d $.

(Henry is spelled in italics to imitate the above Japanese sentence in which *katakana* are used to spell this foreign word.)

Furthermore, the above sentence can be written with *kanji* such as 三 (three), 金 (money), and 愛 (love):

Henry三 愛d 金.

It may be clear here that symbols with meanings in their patterns can be used across languages. *Kanji* have been used in different languages, i.e. Chinese, Korean, and Japanese (and Vietnamese in the past).

In addition, readers might have noticed the fact that even a phonetic writing system utilizes many "symbols" such as numbers (0, 1, 2), and @, ?, #, etc.

Furthermore, it should be added here that the following English words with the same pronunciation are easily distinguished by their different spellings:

right, *write*, *rite*, and *wright*.

In these words the letters *gh*, *w*, and *e* do not have meanings. These "redundant" letters can be currently

utilized to distinguish different words because readers do not follow every letter, but instead grasp whole word images. Therefore, even though the irregularity of English spelling is a nightmare to learners of the language, the loss of a visual distinction would be one of the main points of opposition to the introduction of a phonetic system into English, should such a "reform" be proposed.

Even though the use of this visual sense can make a writing system efficient, the creation and memorization of thousands of symbols would be impracticable and inefficient. If the thousands of concepts, phenomena, and materials humankind encountered all had completely different characters, it would be impossible to memorize and distinguish them. How has the *kanji* system avoided this problem? The following two sections try to answer this question. The answer can be summarized as follows:

1. Each *kanji* is formed as a combination of simple elements (radicals) with their own meanings.
2. The total number of radicals is approximately 180.
3. A single *kanji* can be a word, but a word may also consist of two or more *kanji* as a compound.

These three principles keep the visual writing system (*kanji*) practical and manageable.

Structure of *Kanji*

First, the origins of some *kanji* are shown below.

mountain → 山

person (people) (a person bending forward) → 人

meat, flesh (a piece of meat → 月

middle → 中

inside (house) + (entrance) → 内

upper → 上

low, down → 下

The relatively simple *kanji* listed above are

independent *kanji*, but at the same time they are used as radicals to express more complicated concepts. The following are some examples:

mountain pass	峠	mountain 山 + up 上 + down 下
relation	仲	between 中 + people 人
coelom (body cavity)	腔	meat 月 + hole 穴 + chisel 工

Kanji with the radical of person (人) include 仁 (humanity), 仕 (service), 代 (generation), 佐 (help), etc. *Kanji* with the mountain radical (山) are 岬 (cape), 峰 (peak), 島 (island), 崖 (cliff), etc. *Kanji* with the meat radical (月) are, for example, 腸 (intestine), 骨 (bone), 脂 (fat) and 胃 (stomach). Some *kanji* incorporate phonetic signs, probably because it was necessary in ancient China where they originated, to associate these *kanji* with actual pronunciations. The third radical (工) in 腔 not only expresses the meaning of "carve or dig," but also has a role of indicating a sound "ko" ("gong" in modern Chinese). Therefore, *kanji* with the radical 工 have the same pronunciation "ko" (e.g. 功, 攻, 空).

Approximately 180 radicals are used to form all *kanji* (214 radicals are commonly used in dictionaries. Some additional "historical" radicals are designated for ease of reference. For example, 骨 (bone) is regarded as a separate radical in *kanji* dictionaries). Thus the number of genres used to cover all concepts and materials surrounding humankind is much smaller than that of the categories found in *Roget's Thesaurus*. The *Thesaurus* classifies English words and phrases into 990 sections according to underlying concepts and meanings.

Approximately 2,000 *kanji* are commonly used in Japanese. Learners of Japanese therefore should memorize all of them. However, taking into consideration the fact that these *kanji* are composed of 180 simple radicals, it is difficult to agree that it is easier to memorize 2000 phonetic word elements, e.g. coel-, enteron (see below), whose permutations of letters (sounds) do not provide clues to meanings.

Word Formation

Although *kanji* as we know them today are the products of innumerable people, nobody can create his or her own to use as the medium of communication. The situation

is the same with that of the Roman alphabet. However, a new word can be easily created as a compound by combining two or more *kanji*. As each *kanji* has a meaning in its shape, the meaning of a new word comprising two or more *kanji* can be easily understood and memorized. In addition, because each *kanji* usually represent a syllable, a newly created word is usually short in terms of pronunciation. This section will show the formation of words consisting of *kanji*, and how new words are created by this rule of formation.

The rule of compounding is simple and several examples of *kanji* listed above can create many words as follows:

山上	(mountain + upper = mountain top, surface of a mountain)
山中	(mountain + middle, between = inside of a mountain)
上人	(upper + person = a senior person; a Buddhist priest of high moral capacity)
下人	(low + person = a lowly person; a person in the secular world)
腔腸	(coelom, body cavity + intestine = coelenteron = Gk *koilos* cavity, hollow + Gk *enteron* intestine)
腔腸人	(Probably this means a primitive type of human being with a coelenteron)
腔腸内人	(A kind of alien? Parasite in the coelenteron of a coelenterate?)

Except the last two, all examples are found in a Japanese dictionary. With *kanji*'s ability to make new words easily, many words were created to express concepts newly introduced from Europe and the United States in the late 19th century. Without *kanji*, it would have been difficult to invent a short and intelligible Japanese equivalent of *coelenteron*.

In addition, even the last two ridiculous words are intelligible to everybody because the words are formed of *kanji* whose meanings are familiar.

As a conclusion, *kanji* are an effective tool that give visual appeal to written words. Furthermore, they give flexibility to Japanese through their ability to easily make new words that are intelligible to readers. Word processors

have eliminated the tedious nature of handwriting *kanji*. With the wider use of computers, the effectiveness of *kanji* will be even more enhanced in the future.

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PEDRO MUERTE

By Mike Marchand

The grid sparkles like everything else overlaid on this island—random, piecemeal. Arrivals, departures, but always more lights, new bulbs tasting the kiss of electricity, old bulbs burnt out. Barrios grew, legitimized by titles, their streets likewise, houses with numbers assigned and ignored, not tethered to occupants; fishermen, wives chatting like the chickens in the backyard coops, merchants driving the better cars; expatriates entertained with the attainment of paradise, painters making sense of nonsense on canvas and zinc; waiters, waitresses, and bartenders spending their tips on all that was foreign to their lives in anonymous cities and towns of the greatest country on earth. Or so it is said. A country so great that all who choose to leave their origins and join those who found the yoke of America about their necks at birth despite *el orgullo, la isla, el hogár,* too tenuously to coexist in codependent splendor, thrum and sweat to the bass of meringue cars and the white noise of war games.

Pete was murdered. His name wasn't really Pete, *tu sábes?* When he was young, a kid on the rail fence, growing up in the vastness of dust and dung on the ranch in Texas, he was energy. What can I do, let me try, I can do that. Nigger Pete was the I-need-this-done-so-go-do-it man. When Nigger Pete was doing what-needed-to-get-done-right-now, they all still called, "Pete! Pete!" So the kid came instead—his name wasn't really Pete, but he was energy. But that's not this story.

The island was wild then. Many flags flew over it after the Tainos were exterminated like so many other pests, *mosquitos* swatted by gloved hands, *cucarách*as smeared by Spanish boots. Pirates laid low here, with galleons' plunder, tolls collected on the Main. Later men under many flags taxed for their monarchs and the pirates were called smugglers; guns run, intoxicants imported from the serfdoms of South America to sate the insatiable appetites of the North. All this was and is the stuff of the island. It did not choose its station, its latitude and longitude, its name. It merely bears it, its lush green waiting silently to retake itself.

Now it bears the wires, the transformers, the pipes, the tangible conduits that the comfortably superficial call "cohesive infrastructure;" playthings of the hurricanes, parents of VCRs and satellite dishes that reach beyond the mango, the mangrove, the *flamboyán* and *ceiba*, that serve addictive images as native to the island as the yogurt-curry salmon and Dutch beer consumed in the *gringo* bars. But Pete didn't eat yogurt-curry salmon.

Pete liked Texas food. Steak, potatoes, pure American cliché food. Pete had children he rarely mentioned back up North. In Florida maybe, or Texas. He didn't say. Pete was here when the island was wild. A living could still be made smuggling then—people still live who did. Maybe Pete was one. Or maybe he wasn't. He didn't say. But he was of them.

He was a tall man once, before the bends compressed him. He dove deep in the waters of the island and taught many the same. The tranquility of the rolling, lolling waves, the bathwater warmth of the first 20 feet belied the danger deeper. The pressure of the billions of gallons is bonebreaking, the skull of the hardheaded an eggshell, eardrums popped like bubble wrap. Pete's high frequencies were gone. Pete loved the blues, but he really only felt the music. He'd walk barefoot and bowlegged down the street that still held the day's heat; alongside the Caribbean stroked the sand like a matron's bejeweled hand on a tawny cat. In his hand was a glass, the insulated kind that the boaties like, thick and plastic. It was a colored glass, and its color was code. Green—vodka and tonic, no lime, and none of that well vodka. Rose—Don Q Oro and Diet Pepsi—OK, Diet Coke if that's all ya got. Clear—Dewars and water, I'm feeling a cold comin' on. But most often it was the blue glass—Gordon's gin and tonic, no lime. He'd sit by the well, belly full, freshly stoned, and fish in his bag for the day's first cigarette. He smoked it like a joint, inhaling deeply and exhaling with a smile of satisfaction. His hands shook as he reached for the fresh drink.

He'd seen a lot from that seat. Like the time the bat landed in the cute little bargirl's hair, the bat only slightly more freaked than the girl. The Master Chief, a Cherokee, so high on scotch that he walked around the bar naked until the Navy truck came to get him. He saw drug deals made,

laughed at how slick they thought they were. People so wired that they couldn't speak, not even to order the drink they so badly needed to lubricate numb tongues. Two chicks, two chicks! getting it on over on the other side. He'd sit at the bar and watch tonight's show. He'd smile through the smoke that curled around the few teeth that somehow remained in his mouth.

When the bar closed, he shuffled home, right up the street. Sure, he had a share in the video slot machines, but he'd play them as much as anyone. The junkies and crackheads on the *Malecón* saw the bank bag on Tuesdays, and the new Vespa. Thirty years of work to get there they didn't see. But they saw the bank bag on Tuesdays. But then it was Sundays. But it was a bank bag. Zipper with a lock. They'd need the keys.

That night he walked up the stairs above the store like he always had. Shots of tequila tonight—yeah, man, feelin' GREAT! They said he didn't see them. WHAP! He went down, out. They worried, what if he wakes up? *¡Coño!* Duct tape over his mouth, eyes, nose, his whole head for Christ's sake! Diving had damaged his breathing, too, but they had only seen him as the bank bag.

The next night, Tuesday, 8 o'clock, where's Pete? Keys in the door, glasses, blue glass on its side, blood and gin and tonic and melted ice. Out behind on the old zinc roof, on his side, taped to the plastic chair. Suffocated. For 380 Americans. Pete was murdered. William Simon Baumgardner. *Muerte*.

THE NETHERWORLD

By Michael Brady

In the netherworld, just beyond philosophy, there exists a connecting point between ideas and action. Thoreau walks up the creaky steps onto the podium of the Concord Lyceum. In front of a skeptical crowd, he presents his views on slavery and individual morality. They are not well received, even by his closest friends. Nevertheless, he refuses to pay taxes to a morally bankrupt government and ends up jailed, if only for a night. How many today have even his small amount of courage? One hundred years later, a frail but upright man dressed in traditional Indian garb he wove himself, watches the approaching Sikh soldiers. As they approach, he senses the violence in their nervous eyes and in their tightly gripped rattan staves. Even as the first staff cracks into his collarbone, Gandhi knows he has succeeded, and yet he feels no anger or remorse. In the true philosopher, a spark exists between the idea and the action. Alone, ideals are useless except as a breeding ground for hypocrisy. However, when an authentic person is faced with injustice, a spark connects their ideals and their actions of civil disobedience. Where does this spark lie?

The philosophers who professed an ideal of equality and liberty and never acted on it are too numerous to name. Rousseau spoke of the inherent purity of the uncorrupted. He spoke of a true democracy where each person had a single vote, where people contributed directly in their government. In the mean time, he fathered several children who he then proceeded to disown. Is this the action a just man would take? Then, he nonchalantly spoke of equality and democracy while completely ignoring the rights and equality of the women of France. He professed equality and positive freedom for everyone but women. How could he justify this stand, how can we? We should refuse to judge Rousseau by the supposed conventions of his time. Injustice was reprehensible then and it is reprehensible now; explaining away his misdeeds are tantamount to forgiving them. Rousseau never connected the beauty and power of his philosophy with his own life. Instead he wrote only of how "everyone

else" should behave.

One of our country's greatest figures is Thomas Jefferson. Brilliant author of the *Declaration of Independence*, he was one of our first "American" philosophers. He wrote of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." He wrote of the nobility and common sense of the farmer and the tradesman. Amazingly, Jefferson even realized his own personal failings when he described the utter immorality of enslaving another human being. Yet, despite the practical beauty and sense of his writing, despite the purity of the ideal he possessed, he did not contain the spark to carry his philosophy into action. Perhaps countries need heroes, but Jefferson was not a hero. He remains a brilliant scholar, architect, and politician but he did not possess the strength to act as he believed. Few want to blemish an American icon, but he was simply a talented writer who spoke against inequality but profited from it each day of his life. "Rich slave owner" should be the first line of any introduction to the writings of Jefferson lest we forget his own self-admitted failings and repeat them ourselves.

In contrast to Rousseau and Jefferson we have Thoreau. Thoreau never looked into the eyes of a man that wanted to beat him to death. Thoreau never led a huge march on Washington D.C. or faced down an enormous tank single-handed. In fact, he was a lot like anyone else. He liked the security and easy conversation of his mother's dinner table. When faced with the opposite sex, his social skills seemed to vanish in a mixture of embarrassment and repressed desire. Despite his humanity (or perhaps because of it), he lived his simple philosophy whenever he could, even if that meant making pencils or searching for arrowheads. There remained throughout his writing and throughout his life a wavy but constant thread. Time after time in his writings, he examines himself and his own ideals in relation to those around him. He was a fervent abolitionist in thought, writing, and deed. However, his well-known night in jail was not his only act of civil disobedience. The day after John Brown was hanged, one of his companions, fleeing for his life, ended up in Concord. When a volunteer was needed to drive him through the darkness into Vermont and then Canada, Thoreau immediately volunteered (Harding 261). His philosophy and his life were not separate entities; they were dual parts of a person who wanted to save the world—but

started with himself.

Beginning with yourself is the key that unlocks the spark of action. Thoreau, like Socrates, believed that all your actions should be first turned towards yourself. The spark between the idea and the action is a self-focus. Rousseau and Jefferson turned all their energies outwards into society while ignoring their own self-development and their own unjust acts. They wanted to create a moral society first. However, a moral society, no matter its good intentions, does not create a moral person. Because of the falseness of their actions, their writings are no better than fiction — an exciting and thought provoking read but not real, not practical. An idea, even if it should be true, even if it is beautiful enough to draw a tear, does nothing without its own appropriate action.

Civil disobedience can only start with the individual. The civil rights movement was made up of individuals. Individuals freed India. The spark between ideal and action lies in the individual heart. Like Thoreau I begin with my self first. Only I can see into the deepest recess of my own heart; any spark must come from there.

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SUBWAY IN PARIS
Black & White Photography
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FAMILY PORTRAIT I & II
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TRUE LOVE
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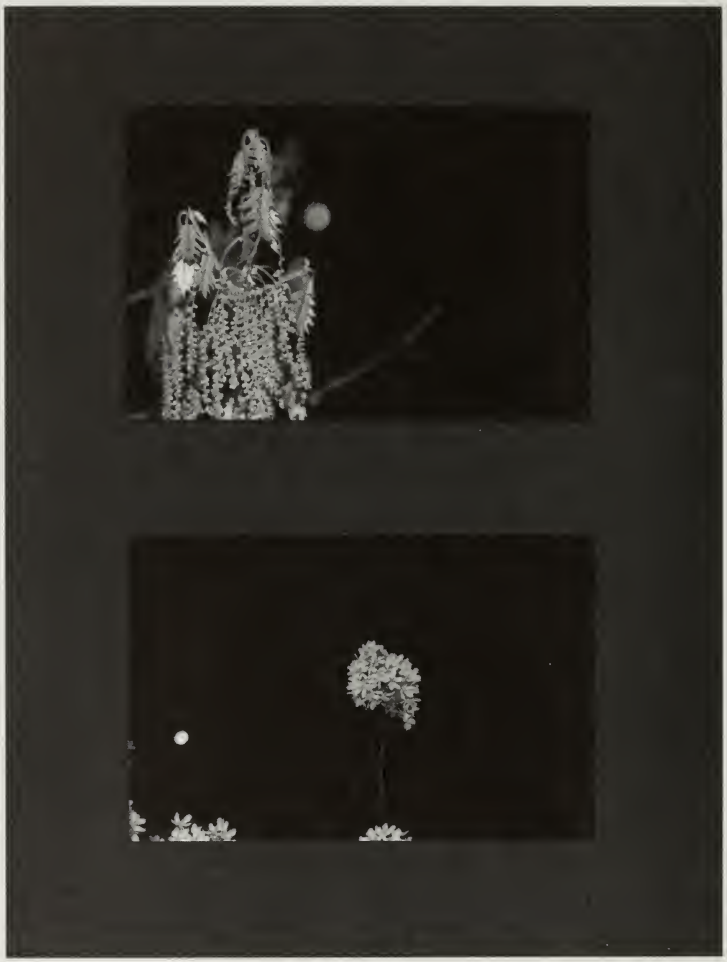

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Black & White Photography
By Patrick Merrill

LITERATURE BELONGS TO THE HUMAN RACE: AN INTERVIEW WITH HA JIN

By Nathaniel T. Beyer & Nancy Derby

Award-winning author Ha Jin came to this country in the 1980s to study British and American literature at Brandeis University. After witnessing the Tiananmen Square massacre, he decided to remain in the United States. Embarking on the sometimes arduous journey of writing, he first published poetry in the *Paris Review* while studying with poet Frank Bidart. Although he has continued to write and publish poetry, he has become best known for his works of fiction. He has won numerous awards, such as the PEN/Hemmingway Award for his first collection of stories, *Ocean of Words*, as well as the PEN/Faulkner and National Book Award for his novel *Waiting*. His most recent novel, *The Crazed*, was published in October 2002 by Pantheon Books. Shortly before his on-campus reading on December 4, 2002, Ha Jin sat down with *Watermark* Co-Editor Nancy Derby and Fiction Editor Nate Beyer for the following interview.

Nate Beyer: You have spoken about how writing in another language is like becoming another person. You've also said that your work is not particularly autobiographical. I'm wondering if you feel like English is sort of a liberation for you, if it's a liberating experience to be able to write in your non-native language and whether writing in Chinese would feel perhaps more constrained. Does English open up an avenue for you to explore things, to imagine things that maybe you wouldn't be able to do in Chinese?

Ha Jin: Maybe in the beginning you may have that experience, in the very beginning, because of the novelty of doing something you hadn't done before. But gradually as you continue, the novelty of writing in a foreign language dissipates. I don't think that writing in English is a liberating experience at all. I'm sure I could write it better in Chinese. I'm certain of that. But I had to survive economically; it's a

necessity to live as a person. And also by writing in Chinese, I don't think it could have the integrity of the work because of the censorship in China. So once I decided to write in English, no matter what, I had to continue down that path. Life is short; I could not reverse my decision.

Nancy Derby: Do you think that there are enough Chinese speakers in this country, enough to make a Chinese language author successful?

HJ: There are, in fact, a few Chinese writers who write in Chinese and can support themselves in the States because they can publish books in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and here. Those writers were known before they came to the States; they were already published. They had audiences already there. For me, I had to start from scratch, so there was no audience. I didn't have a degree in Chinese. I did look for jobs related to Chinese, but I was not qualified for teaching or doing anything in Chinese. That's why English was the only way. Also, a work in Chinese wouldn't count as a publication for teaching in an English Department.

NB: You said at one point that when you teach writing, you tell your students to accept themselves as failures. I wondered if you could elaborate on that and also maybe talk about your own experiences, not as a successful writer, but instead when you were still struggling and going through the process of rejection that every writer has to go through, and how you dealt with that.

HJ: The reason why I said you have to accept yourself as a failure if you want to write well is that success is a kind of phantom, it is remote, it's not something that can be obtained. Also if you read enough literature you can see that. All the great books have already been written so how can you write it better? In that sense, everybody is a failure. You continue the process. But whether you can go further, it is really uncertain. So in that sense, it is necessary to accept yourself not as a success but as a kind of failure. As to the frustration, I think it is necessary, even all the rejection, it is part of the process. I think you build up your ability to resist, you have to persist. It is part of the process that everybody will go

through. You want to be established as a writer, you have to go through that process. There is no way around that.

NB: But you have been a success as a writer, not just ...

HJ: I don't think so (laughs).

NB: You have had a different take, a sort of fresh newness of voice and perspective. Where did you find that? Or how did you come about that? Was that just something inside of you that you were able to...

HJ: No, if you have a story, or you make a story, the story itself will assume a voice and angle and so you try to fulfill the material. So I don't think it's something....that is, something I made, but on the other hand, the material, the subject, story, they have their own logic. So my role was just to fulfill the material.

ND: I read that you were thinking of writing about Americans, Asian-Americans, in your next book. Do you think that is sort of a psychological thing, that you are seeing yourself as a Chinese-American, or is it something you just want to experiment with?

HJ: I've lived in this country for almost 18 years and haven't returned to China in that time. So contemporary life there is not familiar to me. As I continue, the meaningful experience for me is the American experience. But again, it will be a big hurdle, whether I can make the jump, it's a challenge.

NB: I have a question about your new novel, *The Crazed*. The professor character in the book seems like a sort of Dostoyevskian character, almost a holy fool who is able to say things the other characters can't say, and talk about things that other characters can't bring up. The past also seems to come up largely through his character. He also expresses a great deal of anger; anger at his family situation but also anger at China and the cultural revolution, and he says at one point that being an intellectual in China is like being pickled in filth. You have also spoken about the anger that you had

seeing Tiananmen Square. Is some of that anger coming out in the professor character a reflection of your own anger? I was wondering if you still feel angry about that or about the cultural revolution and things that happened since.

HJ: Yeah, I think the anger is genuine. For me, I have anger too, especially about Tiananmen Square, the massacre. Yes, I'm angry. Originally when I start to write a novel, I just have the professor; I didn't have the Tiananmen Square part. But when that happened, this is another traumatic event, so I want to combine both, so that it will make his anger, his suffering, not just personal. To a large extent, it is historical and national. So of course, I was angry, I am angry, still angry. So it is to some extent personal, but I did use him as a character. He lost his mind, so whatever he said, whether it is meaningful or meaningless, is a part of the story, the history. That is the difficult part: how to make sense of this mess.

NB: Because he is also able to contradict himself, say one thing in one chapter and...Which I think is great.

HJ: (laughs) Thank you.

ND: Does that sense of anger tie in at all with the idea of failure? Are you able to make order of the anger, or is that part of the failure? What are your personal feelings?

HJ: Personal feelings... Nate mentioned Dostoyevsky. I did read all his work in order to write this book, and I am flattered by your mentioning the connection. But if you read him, you can see the greatness, the magnificence of his work. That really diminishes my own work. That's one sense of failure. Also the very fact that I am writing in English, I'm not able to write my best work in Chinese. That is a kind of failure, a tragic situation. I don't have a choice. I want to be individual, want to have some freedom and artistic integrity. So I have to do it in English.

NB: In the novel *The Crazed*, you talk a lot about Li Po and other Chinese poets. I wondered if you saw yourself in that wonderful tradition of Chinese literati. Do you see yourself as coming out of that, as somehow part of that con-

tinuum? Or do you see yourself as like the people you studied in English, like Ezra Pound and Eliot who translated, in the loose sense at least, poetry and sort of mediated between the west and China. Do you feel you are more of a mediator, or are you coming more from a Chinese tradition of writers?

ND: Or are you even more American because of your position as an immigrant, as so many Americans started out?

HJ: In that sense perhaps I'm more American. But I also read Chinese poetry in the original. I do believe Chinese has a great poetic tradition. The fiction part is not that strong but poetry is a great tradition. In that sense, I'm not a mediator. I'm not a cultural ambassador. I don't have the ability. I think I'm individual. I take whatever that is useful and I think whatever I like best is my own heritage. But it doesn't have to be Chinese. It can be other literature as well. In that sense, literature belongs to the human race. It does not belong to a single nation.

Photo by Vernon Doucette, courtesy of Boston University

including an interview with author Ha Jin